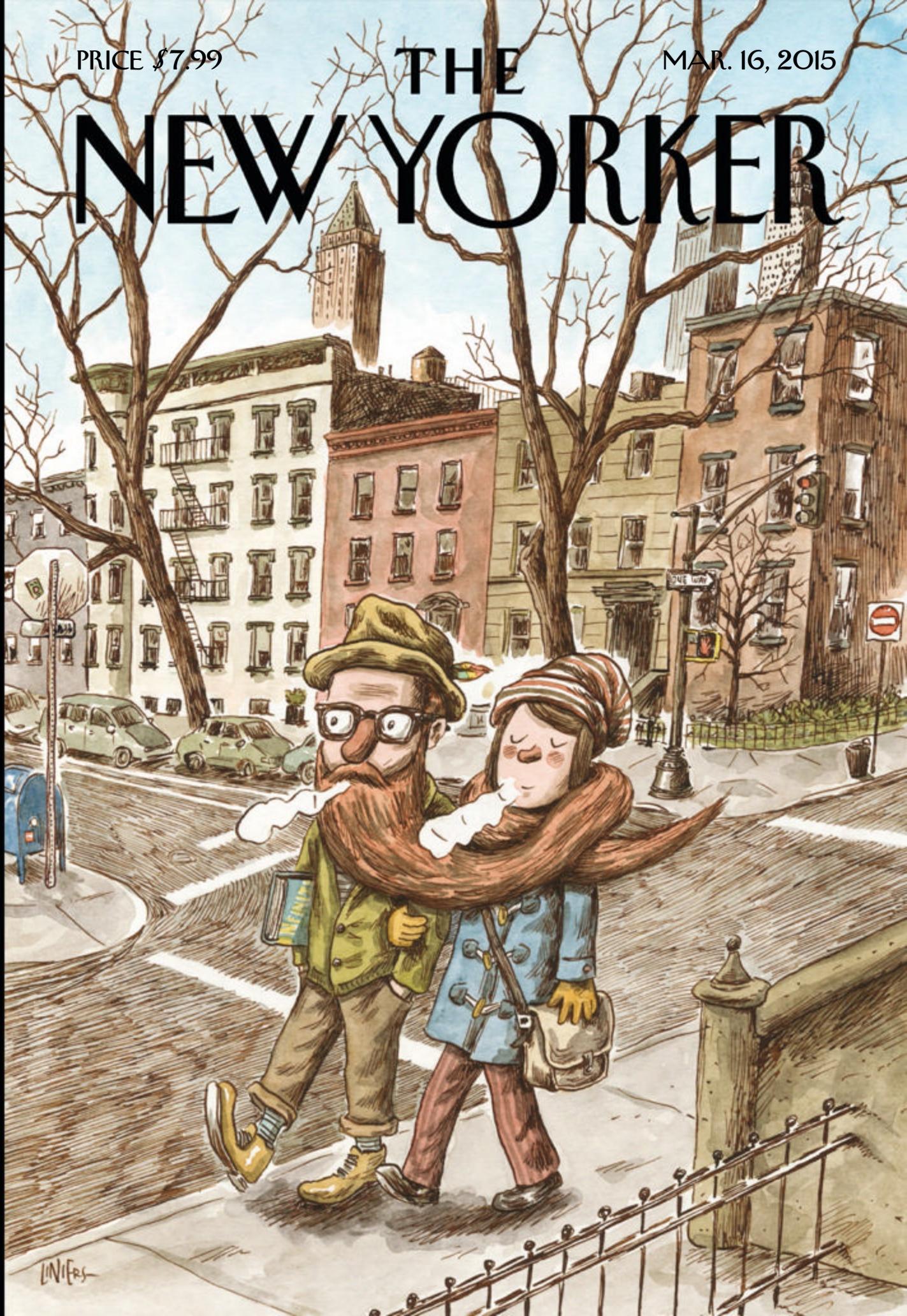


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THE MAIL

CUOMO'S WAY

Jeffrey Toobin's Profile of Governor Andrew Cuomo is excellent, but it does not reflect his practice of deceit ("The Albany Chronicles," February 16th). In 2012, some of the people whom Cuomo had appointed to a commission to review the Long Island Power Authority's response to a storm did not endorse the recommendation he wanted (that LIPA should be disbanded). His response was to rewrite parts of the commission's final report. In 2013, he claimed that the Moreland Commission would be independent, and could investigate anyone, but when the commission subpoenaed a firm that had made ads for the Governor's campaign, Cuomo's staff demanded that the subpoenas be recalled; he also intervened when the commission sought to subpoena a trade group that had supported him. He ultimately shut down the commission before it released a final report, as part of a back-room deal with the legislators whom the committee was supposed to be investigating. Cuomo later insisted that the commission was under his control, in contradiction of his previous statements, not to mention his own executive order.

*Matthew A. Feigin
New York City*

Toobin mentions Cuomo's disdain for unions but not the extent to which he refuses to deal with them. I am a professor at Queens College, of the City University of New York. The contract for CUNY professors ran out in the fall of 2010, the year that Cuomo was first elected governor. The union has been attempting to negotiate a new contract since then, but the state has not responded with a financial package. Because of the Taylor Law, strikes by state workers are illegal. As a result, wages at CUNY have been frozen for the past five years.

*David Richter
New York City*

PAY DAYS

When reading James Surowiecki's piece on above-market wages, one should note that stagnation in workers' pay goes hand in hand with the explosion of C.E.O. salaries ("A Fair Day's Wage," February 9th). In the past, executives got rich in the course of their careers, not all at once. They were paid to build their companies over time and develop relationships with workers and clients. The rise of the blockbuster payout has encouraged C.E.O.s to go for big corporate deals that often have no economic rationale except to generate bonuses for management, and which come at significant societal costs—including extensive layoffs and reduced quality of life in cities that formerly housed corporate headquarters and manufacturing facilities. But, with tens of millions of dollars in golden parachutes and other incentive payments, top executives have little reason to stick around and deal with the aftermath of their decisions.

*Steven Bavaria
Chestnut Ridge, N.Y.*

SOCIAL STUDIES

Kelefa Sanneh, in his review of "The Cultural Matrix: Understanding Black Youth," by Orlando Patterson and Ethan Fosse, seems to reveal the irrelevance of sociology as a discipline to both the understanding of and the solution to problems in the African-American community ("Don't Be Like That," February 9th). Instead of developing clear hypotheses that could lead to testable, robust, and replicable interventions, sociology, ostensibly a descriptive rather than a normative discipline, appears to be caught up in doctrinal battles and anxiety over political correctness.

*Saul Raw
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



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FOR MORE THAN half a century, the American choral sound has been defined by the great college ensembles of the Upper Midwest, such as the St. Olaf Choir, with its lusciously layered tones. But recently young New Yorkers in groups like Roomful of Teeth (pictured above) have been blazing a new trail, forming intimately scaled ensembles of brave solo singers whose lean timbres resemble those of the early-music and new-music vocal groups of Europe. On March 17, Roomful of Teeth collaborates with the outstanding instrumentalists of the American Contemporary Music Ensemble at the Met Museum's Temple of Dendur. They will perform "Drone Mass," a world première by the Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, whose sleek score for the film "The Theory of Everything" was nominated for an Academy Award.

ART | DANCE | NIGHT LIFE
MOVIES | THE THEATRE
CLASSICAL MUSIC
ABOVE & BEYOND
FOOD & DRINK

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONNO RATTMAN

ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky." Through May 10.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Björk." Through June 7.

MOMA PS1

"Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades." Through Aug. 31.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"On Kawara—Silence." Through May 3.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic." Through May 24.

ASIA SOCIETY

"Buddhist Art of Myanmar." Through May 10.

JEWISH MUSEUM

"Laurie Simmons: How We See." Opens March 13.

MUSEO DEL BARRIO

"Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa, Art and Film." Through June 27.

MUSEUM OF BIBLICAL ART

"Sculpture in the Age of Donatello." Through June 19.

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

"Everything Is Design: The Work of Paul Rand." Through July 19.

GALLERIES SHORT LIST

CHELSEA

Nick Mauss
303
507 W. 24th St. 212-255-1121.
Through April 11.

Anicks Yi
The Kitchen
512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.
Through April 11.

"The Painter of Modern Life"
Kern
532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.
Through April 11.

"The Radiants"
Bortolami
530 W. 20th St. 212-727-2050.
Through March 29.

DOWNTOWN

Hito Steyerl
Artists Space
38 Greene St. 212-226-3970.
Through May 24.

BROOKLYN

"Destroy, She Said"
The Boiler
191 N. 14th St., Greenpoint.
718-599-2144.
Through April 5.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum

"Discovering Japanese Art: American Collectors and the Met"

The best collection of Japanese art on the East Coast is housed at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston, but this centennial showcase of the Met's holdings is strong and varied enough that New Yorkers can save themselves the trip. The Met began collecting Japanese art in 1914, but arms and armor formed the bulk of its holdings until 1929, when the widow of the sugar baron H. O. Havemeyer bequeathed the museum an impression of Hokusai's "Great Wave"—so crisp it's hard to believe it's from 1830—and a twelve-panel screen depicting a coursing river with a vivacity typical of the Rinpa school, along with works by Rembrandt and Degas. (Another print collector was Frank Lloyd Wright, who sold the Met his portraits of Kabuki actors when business was slow.) The Met's curators made frequent visits to Japan after 1945, but the great transformation came in 1975, with the acquisition of some four hundred objects from the Packard collection, a move so ambitious that Thomas Hoving, the museum's director at the time, had to suspend purchases in other departments. One of the best of these works may be the serenest: a Muromachi-era scroll painting of a solitary man trudging through rain, oblivious to the lines of calligraphic poetry falling around him. Through Sept. 27.

the verve of Bahia. Through May 16. (Americas Society, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-249-8950.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Subodh Gupta

The centerpiece of the Indian artist's new show is humbler and more affecting than his more predictably grandiose efforts: a twelve-foot-wide jumble of salvaged aluminum sinks and other kitchenware, including tiffin boxes and *karahi*, punctuated by faucets with running water. (The piece gains little from the coy Magritte-Duchamp face-off of its title, "This Is Not a Fountain.") Gupta is gifted, but he falters when he goes glam: the appeal of gold-plated rods stacked on a wooden table is merely decorative. He's better at the quotidian scale and intimate mood of a work like "My Family Portrait," in which worn pots and pans are arranged on racks borrowed from his sister and brother. Through April 25. (Hauser & Wirth, 511 W. 18th St. 212-790-3900.)

Chuck Samuels

If the Canadian photographer's sly, meticulously staged self-portraits look familiar, it's because they're all based on famous female nudes by male photographers, including Man Ray, Edward Weston, and Helmut Newton. Casting himself as a homoerotic icon, Samuels throws the male gaze back on itself in works that are funny but more than just punch lines. Though he has claimed his agenda is feminist, his critique is confused by narcissism. Still, that doesn't soften its bite. Through March 28. (ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

"Moderno: Design for Living in Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, 1940–1978"

In postwar Latin America, modern design was more than a look—it was a national enterprise, endorsed by governments undertaking grand schemes of industrialization and urbanization. This robust exhibition highlights the ways in which Brazilian, Mexican, and Venezuelan designers imbricated art, architecture, manufacturing, and craft, first in domestic objects (including the covetable wooden furniture of Venezuela's Miguel Arroyo), then at the grand scale of Brasília. *Moderno* usually meant Bauhausish, but, given national ambitions, tradition had a role to play, too; the Mexican furniture-maker Clara Porset integrated woven agave fibres into her designs, and Roberto Burle Marx, the landscape architect behind Rio's famed modernist gardens, produced bowls and plates painted with folkloric landscapes. But the tour de force here is by the underrated Italian-Brazilian Lina Bo Bardi. As the dictatorship iced her commissions, Bo Bardi yoked a log to a tripod of branches, fashioning a chair with the rigor of Europe and

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Jan Groover

The New York photographer, who died in 2011, is best known for her elegantly jumbled still-lifes. These stark, unpopulated landscapes were made in the early eighties, on forays into Brooklyn's industrial margins. The subjects—warehouse façades, parked trucks, empty lots—are far from picturesque, but the platinum-palladium process Groover used gives the prints an exquisite finish, with skies like burnished silver. Her work recalls the chill, matter-of-fact approach of Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz. Like them, Groover was interested in America the ordinary, which has a beauty all its own. Through March 28. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

Lynn Hershman Leeson

Since the nineties, the San Francisco-based artist has been best known as the director of some very distinctive films starring Tilda Swinton. But before Leeson trained her lens on the indomitable star she turned it on herself. In 1974, she created an alter ego named Roberta Breitmore, who had her own bank account, credit cards, and driver's license. It was a private performance without an audience, which was one of Leeson's points: Was a woman ever really known to anyone but herself? Now that the artist is getting the attention she deserves (a major museum survey just opened in Germany), we are treated to this loose retrospective, which delights with its idiosyncrasies and philosophical strengths. In addition to Leeson's looking-glass feminism, there's an abiding interest in science and the environment, real-world concerns that she renders both otherworldly and strangely familiar in five decades' worth of paintings, collages, and sculptural tableaux that reject signature style in favor of a wide-ranging and fantastic realism. Through April 5. (Donahue, 99 Bowery. 646-896-1368.)

Deborah Turbeville

The first New York show devoted to the maverick fashion photographer since her death, in 2013, highlights the atmospheric work she made at Versailles in the early eighties. Given access to areas tourists never see, Turbeville recorded dusty storerooms and broken statuary in mottled, sepia-toned images. The mood is hushed, as if in anticipation of ghosts, embodied by pale, languorous models who waft through the ruined rooms like lost spirits. In keeping with Turbeville's style, much of the work is unframed, collaged, or captioned in her own handwriting, like pages from a fragile scrapbook. Through March 21. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-6223.)



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DANCE



DIVINE COMEDY

Robert Kleinendorst, of Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance.

AS THE CURTAIN RISES on Paul Taylor's 1985 piece "Last Look"—it will be part of his company's current season at the Koch Theatre—you see, under a low, grimy light, a big pile of God knows what in the middle of the stage. It starts to move. It is a pile of human beings. Slowly, they crawl apart. One man stands out from the others. He rises; he falls; he rises and falls again and again, flinging his arms and legs so violently that he seems to be trying to cast them off his body. The dancer here is Robert Kleinendorst. Much of Taylor's best work depends on the performers looking human and inhuman at the same time, and no one in the company looks more human than Kleinendorst, down to the corny sideburns that he says the troupe's set and costume designer Santo Loquasto is always trying to get him to shave off. ("I can't. I've had them so long I can't imagine being without them.") He is therefore perfect as the initial display item in "Last Look." If a man like this could suffer such a fate, none of us are safe.

When Kleinendorst went to college—Luther College in Decorah, Iowa—he intended to

make his living in musical theatre, so he majored in vocal performance and took acting classes as well. After a while, it occurred to him that, in order to get a job in a musical, he would probably have to be able to dance, too, so he added dance classes. Of course, he then grew up to be a dancer, but Paul Taylor makes extensive use of his dramatic training. He often gets character roles, especially comic ones. (He does an excellent pimp, with a big, brown, disgusting cigar, in "Black Tuesday.") But the thing that Taylor seems to ask of him most often is an unforced sort of poignance—cousin, in a strange way, to the comedy. In the heart-stabbing "Sunset," the passage most likely to deprive you of your composure is a duet for Kleinendorst and Michael Trusnovec, as two soldiers going to the front. The men do little reaches and kicks and leaps, often side by side or follow-the-leader. Trusnovec seems to be teaching Kleinendorst something. "He's a mentor," Kleinendorst says. "This whole dance is about finding comfort wherever you can before you go off and maybe die. It is this very intimate thing that you can't express." They express it.

After Trusnovec, Kleinendorst is the company's most senior dancer. He is forty-one, with a wife (the former Taylor dancer Amy Young) and a child. About half his time is spent on the road, touring. After seventeen years of doing Taylor's bone-crunching work, he wakes up three to four times a night because of pain. "I can't dance that much longer," he says, almost with bewilderment. Go see him now.

—Joan Acocella

Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance

In its sixty-first year, the company embarks on a major transformation. The Paul Taylor Dance Company was devoted exclusively to the oeuvre of the modern-dance master Paul Taylor; now, under a new name, the ensemble will branch out, presenting works from the early days of modern dance, as well as more recent pieces by younger choreographers. This season includes two guest appearances: the José Limón Company will perform Doris Humphrey's stately "Passacaglia and Fugue," from 1938, and Shen Wei Dance Arts will dance Shen Wei's large-scale, abstract "Rite of Spring," from 2003. But don't worry, Taylor has not tired of making dances. The three-week season also features a swath of repertory (including the beautiful "Beloved Renegade") and two new pieces, "Sea Lark"—a collaboration with the artist Alex Katz—and "Death and the Damsel." There will also be live music, for the first time in many years, provided by the excellent Orchestra of St. Luke's. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. March 10-15 and March 17. Through March 29.)

Compagnie CNDC-Angers

During the final seventeen years of Merce Cunningham's life, Robert Swinston was the great choreographer's right-hand man. Swinston directed the Cunningham company's farewell tour (2010-11), and since 2013 he has transformed the performing arm of a French choreographic center into a Cunningham offshoot, which now makes its U.S. débüt. The format is like that of an Event, Cunningham-speak for a collage of choreography created across decades. New elements include scene design by the French artist Jackie Matisse (granddaughter of Henri) and a score, played live by John King and Gelsey Bell. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 10-15.)

New York Spring Spectacular

It's been nearly two decades since the Rockettes had a spring show. This one is about an old-fashioned tour guide threatened by technology. Produced by Harvey Weinstein, it boasts vocal cameos by Whoopi Goldberg, Tina Fey, and Amy Poehler; video cameos by 50 Cent, Donald Trump, and Victor Cruz; and live appearances by Laura

Benanti and Derek Hough. The opening number, set to Taylor Swift, is by Mia Michaels, of "So You Think You Can Dance," but direction and choreography by Warren Carlyle, of "After Midnight," give more cause for hope. Jared Grimes, who tapped up a storm in "After Midnight," appears here, singing and dancing in an artificial downpour. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 866-858-0007. March 12-15. Through May 3.)

ABT Studio Company / ABT JKO School

On Friday, American Ballet Theatre's junior ensemble—a transition point between the school and full professional status—presents a program of excerpts and short works by Petipa, Antony Tudor, and Merce Cunningham. On Saturday, the students take over, with an evening that includes Balanchine's windblown "Valse Fantaisie" and an excerpt from Fokine's "Les Sylphides." (Schimmel Center, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 866-811-4111. March 13-14.)

Amanda Selwyn Dance Theatre

Selwyn often spins variations on a poetic theme, with individual

meditations unspooling like private thoughts from a larger group dynamic. Her sculptural use of the body is abetted by atmospheric, expressive lighting. "Renewal" is a new evening-length work for eleven dancers, made up of short sketches exploring the theme of reinvention, revisiting and retooling material from earlier pieces. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. March 13-15.)

Martha Graham Dance Company

In recent years, most performances by the Graham company have involved some sort of explication, so the show-and-tell format of the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival should fit the troupe like a glove. (An old glove, considering the historical connections between the group and the Y.) Preceding a performance of "Cave of the Heart," Graham's harrowing retelling of the Medea myth, dancers will break down movement motifs, demonstrating how Graham's technique applies to these particular characters. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 13-15.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

James Bay

It may not be unusual for unknown musicians to rise to fame via the Internet, but Bay, a singer-songwriter from Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, England, has a particularly spectacular story. At an open-mic night in London, an audience member filmed Bay performing and uploaded the footage to YouTube. The video caught the attention of Republic Records, and the label flew Bay to New York and signed him. The young crooner has a strong sense of balladry and has since won the hearts of many listeners, along with such accolades as the 2015 Brit Awards Critics' Choice. Bay's débüt album, "Chaos and the Calm," comes out next week. (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. March 16.)

Diana Krall

While Bob Dylan was dipping into Frank Sinatra's catalogue for his new album, "Shadows in the Night," the jazz pianist and song stylist Krall was remaking "Wallflower," a rickety country waltz written by Dylan in 1971 and recorded a year later by Doug Sahm. It's the title song of her new record, which also includes interpretations of material by the Eagles, Elton John, the Carpenters, and other big acts of the seventies. The album was due to be released last fall, but it was postponed after Krall came down with pneumonia. (March 12: Capitol Theatre, 149 Westchester Ave., Port Chester. thecapitoltheatre.com. March 14: Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500.)

Keb' Mo'

Few musicians emblemize the blues like Kevin Moore. During his twenty-year career as Keb' Mo', he has won three Grammys, appeared on "Sesame Street," collaborated with Martin Scorsese for the miniseries "The Blues," and earned his own Gibson signature acoustic guitar. He even portrayed the legendary bluesman Robert Johnson in the 1998 documentary "Can't You Hear the Wind Howl?" As closely associated with the blues as he is, folk, pop, jazz, and rock also inform his music, which is as accomplished as it is accessible. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. March 13-14.)

Twerps

This Melbourne quartet is the latest band from the antipodes with the kind of upbeat, carefree sound that

suggests everyone in the region grew up lazing in the sun, smoking grass, and listening to psychedelic jangle-pop of a certain vintage. Bright, cleanly strummed guitar chords accompany excellent vocal melodies—delivered alternately by Martin Frawley and Julia McFarlane—that stick in your head without becoming cloying after multiple listens. With **Ultimate Painting**, a darker, sixties-inspired slacker-pop duo made up of former members of the U.K. rock groups Mazes and Veronica Falls. (March 13: Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtradenc.com. March 14: Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. 212-260-4700.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Herb Alpert and Lani Hall

The trumpeter, sixties pop icon, music mogul, and educational philanthropist Alpert is joined by his wife, the vocalist Hall, for an evening that will draw on his new album, "In the Mood," which dresses songbook chestnuts in pop-funk finery. To be sure, the hale seventy-nine-year-old won't ignore the peppy instruments that made him a star with his Tijuana Brass ensemble, or "This Guy's in Love with You," the Bacharach-David gem that gave him a No. 1 hit in 1968. (Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. March 10-21.)

Roy Haynes

Time is a slippery commodity in this venerable percussionist's hands, but he never loses hold of it, and it has been kind to him—he's still going strong after seven decades of refashioning the role of the drums

in jazz. His ninetieth birthday is March 13, and he is celebrating with the guitarist **Pat Metheny** and the bassist **Christian McBride**. The trumpeter **Roy Hargrove** joins him on March 14, and the dancer **Savion Glover** is on hand on the 15th. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592.)

Jason Moran

The Village Vanguard, a jazz bastion and unofficial temple for the music, is marking its eightieth birthday. The celebration starts on March 10—with **Kenny Barron, Stanley Cowell, Fred Hersch**, and **Ethan Iverson** joining Moran for solo piano performances—and it ends on March 15, with the **Charles Lloyd New Quartet**. In between, Moran and his **Bandwagon** ensemble are presiding over programs devoted to the music of Thelonious Monk, poetry (featuring **Elizabeth Alexander** and **Yusef Komunyakaa**), folk music, and comedy, reflecting the wide swath of entertainment that originally filled the basement establishment. (178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037.)

Jacky Terrasson

The pianist, who has moved in and out of the spotlight since his débüt, in the nineties, has a new record, "Take This," on the recently rebooted, legendary label Impulse! Records. It includes such time-honored jazz classics as "Take Five," "Blue in Green," and "Un Poco Loco," but the nervy stylist isn't looking to the past—he enlisted a Malian percussionist and a human beatbox artist on the album. He celebrates its release March 13-15, at the helm of a quartet. (Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595.)

X MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

Alice in the Cities

In this drama by the twenty-eight-year-old Wim Wenders, from 1974, Rüdiger Vogler plays the director's alter ego, Philip Winter, a thirty-something German journalist on the American scene. Taking Polaroids instead of writing a story, Philip loses his job and has to go home. But first, in New York, he's thrown together with Alice van Damm (Yella Rottländer), a nine-year-old German girl abandoned by her mother (Lisa Kreuzer), and takes her on an odyssey from Manhattan to Amsterdam and a series of German towns. Philip's lonely road trip through the land of his fantasies morphs into a quasi-familial road trip through the land of his own unavoidable realities. Here, Wenders crystallizes his style of existential sentimentality and heartwarming blankness. His cool eye for urbanism and design blends a love of kitsch with a hatred for commercialism, a historicist sensibility with a fear of history's ghosts. Wenders's New York time capsule includes a look at the ballgame organist playing at Shea Stadium and a glimpse under the Rockaway boardwalk; his Amsterdam is charmless and grungy, and his German towns blend grim industry and grubby necessity. A jukebox playing Canned Heat, a Chuck Berry concert, and even John Ford's obituary lend a desperate touch of life to Wenders's gray continent. In German and English.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; March 17.)

Bunny Lake Is Missing

At first contact with an electric guitar, Otto Preminger, born in 1906, got a shock, which he conveys in this jangled psychological thriller from 1965, set in swinging London. A young American woman, Ann Lake (Carol Lynley), has just arrived with her journalist brother, Steven (Keir Dullea), and her four-year-old daughter, Bunny. On her first day at her new school, young Bunny vanishes, although nobody—neither teachers nor students nor, for that matter, viewers—have seen her. The dapper, ironic Superintendent Newhouse (Laurence Olivier) takes over the investigation. His imputations regarding Ann's sanity take over the story, but the film's real charge lies elsewhere—in Preminger's view of a jolting, disoriented age of rock and roll. The mental chaos of the times is reflected in the behavior

of the local solipsistic eccentrics (including a randy raconteur, played by Noël Coward), the nightmarish images, the backdrop of student protest and political crisis, and the frenzied soundtrack, which features the music of the Zombies.—*R.B.* (BAM Cinématek; March 15.)

Buzzard

The second shot of Joel Potrykus's second feature offers a cinematic high: a five-minute-plus closeup of a pale, scruffy, moon-eyed, blandly insolent young man pulling a fast one. Marty Jackitansky (Joshua Burge) tells a bank officer to close his account and then reopens it immediately for a fifty-dollar new-account bonus. A temp at the same bank, Marty is a brazen master of gaming the system; he returns the bank's office supplies to a store for cash and calls consumer hot lines to demand refunds—but when he steals small refund checks meant for the bank's customers, it's a scam too far. Fearing arrest, Marty goes on the run. Potrykus constructs the character of Marty as an Emma Bovary who's in thrall to horror movies and headbanger rock, a raging king of anomie and attitude in a suburban wasteland of no future. (The director co-stars as Marty's only friend, Derek, a super-nerdy colleague). Marty remains a blank even as his violent fantasies break through to reality, but his tenuous connections to his family and the countdown of his scant funds sketch a chilling story. Potrykus's puckishly outrageous visions are short on insight, but they pack an enduring hallucinatory power.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

The Fall of the Roman Empire

Physically, it's a milestone: no producer in the decades since has assembled as vast an ocean of extras or as stunning an acreage of plaster as Samuel Bronston did in his Spanish studio, and no director in Bronston's stable could make better use of it than Anthony Mann did. In the culturally aspiring movie world of 1964, it was possible to film the same basic story as "Gladiator" and actually have the dying Emperor Marcus Aurelius use a phrase like "Pax Romana." Alec Guinness plays Aurelius as a weary intellectual who wants a Roman peace that all foreigners can join, not as slaves or as clients but as citizens. Unfortunately for Aurelius, but perhaps fortunately

for audiences, Aurelius' successor, Commodus, played here by the flamboyant Christopher Plummer, forsakes the Pax Romana and turns Rome into an empire of camp. Sophia Loren ups the entertainment level as Aurelius' daughter, especially when the dashing, heroic Stephen Boyd makes her feel like a vestal virgin again.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; March 14.)

Fifty Shades of Grey

The setting is Washington State, the place where love gets weird. Could there be something in the rain? Boy meets girl, but there's always a hitch; in "Twilight," the boy was a vampire, and now, in Sam Taylor-Johnson's gloomy new film, the girl is swept off her feet, only to discover that the boy wants to tie her up by the wrists. It's like an R-rated game of Twister. The script was adapted by Kelly Marcel from the golden-tongued best-seller by E. L. James, but not quite adapted enough. Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) remains as dreary as ever, despite the snugness of his torture room and his peculiar habit of sitting down to play Chopin, molto adagio, at the drop of a riding crop. As Anastasia Steele, the bashful student who yearns for him, Dakota Johnson strives courageously, and even finds traces of wit in the role, but she still bumps into the old, disheartening question: would the girl adore the boy if it weren't for his billions, his blinding white shirts, and the ride she gets on his chopper? Warning: the film contains whipping scenes, which some pastry chefs may find distressing.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/23 & 3/2/15.) (In wide release.)

Focus

This comic thriller begins as a twist on the classic crime romance "Trouble in Paradise": two smooth grifters, the veteran Nicky (Will Smith) and the novice Jess (Margot Robbie), pick each other's pockets and thus seal a partnership made in heaven. Nicky teaches Jess some secrets and recruits her for his high-class, quasi-corporate criminal team, which moves into New Orleans to fleece the yokels on hand for a Super Bowl-like event. A compulsive gambler who risks the team's bankroll, Nicky is also a consummate professional who's unwilling to take a chance on love. But he and Jess meet again later in Buenos Aires, when they're working

OPENING CINDERELLA

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 13. (In wide release.)

CHAMPS

A documentary about boxing, directed by Bert Marcus, featuring Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Mark Wahlberg, and Denzel Washington. Opening March 13. (In limited release.)

THE COBBLER

Adam Sandler stars in this fantasy, as a shoemaker who gains the ability to see from his customers' perspectives. Directed by Thomas McCarthy; co-starring Dan Stevens, Steve Buscemi, Dustin Hoffman, and Ellen Barkin. Opening March 13. (In limited release.)

CYMBELINE

Michael Almereyda directed this adaptation of Shakespeare's play, starring Ethan Hawke, Ed Harris, and Milla Jovovich, set in contemporary Los Angeles. Opening March 13. (In limited release.)

RUN ALL NIGHT

Liam Neeson stars in this thriller, as a hit man who must challenge his former employer in order to save his family. Directed by Jaume Collet-Serra; co-starring Joel Kinnaman, Common, and Genesis Rodriguez. Opening March 13. (In limited release.)

SEYMOUR: AN INTRODUCTION
Ethan Hawke directed this documentary, about the pianist and teacher Seymour Bernstein. Opening March 13. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

"Screenwriters and the Blacklist." March 11 at 6:45 and March 13 at 9:15: "Two Mules for Sister Sara" (1970, Don Siegel). • March 12 at 7 and March 14 at 9: "Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here" (1969, Abraham Polonsky). • March 14 at 2:45: "The Last Sunset" (1961, Robert Aldrich). • March 14 at 5:15: "The Fall of the Roman Empire."

BAM CINÉMATEK

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 11 at 8:30: "Stubborn" (2015, Armel Hostiou). • March 12 at 8: "Portrait of the Artist" (2014, Antoine Barraud). • "Black & White 'Scope: American

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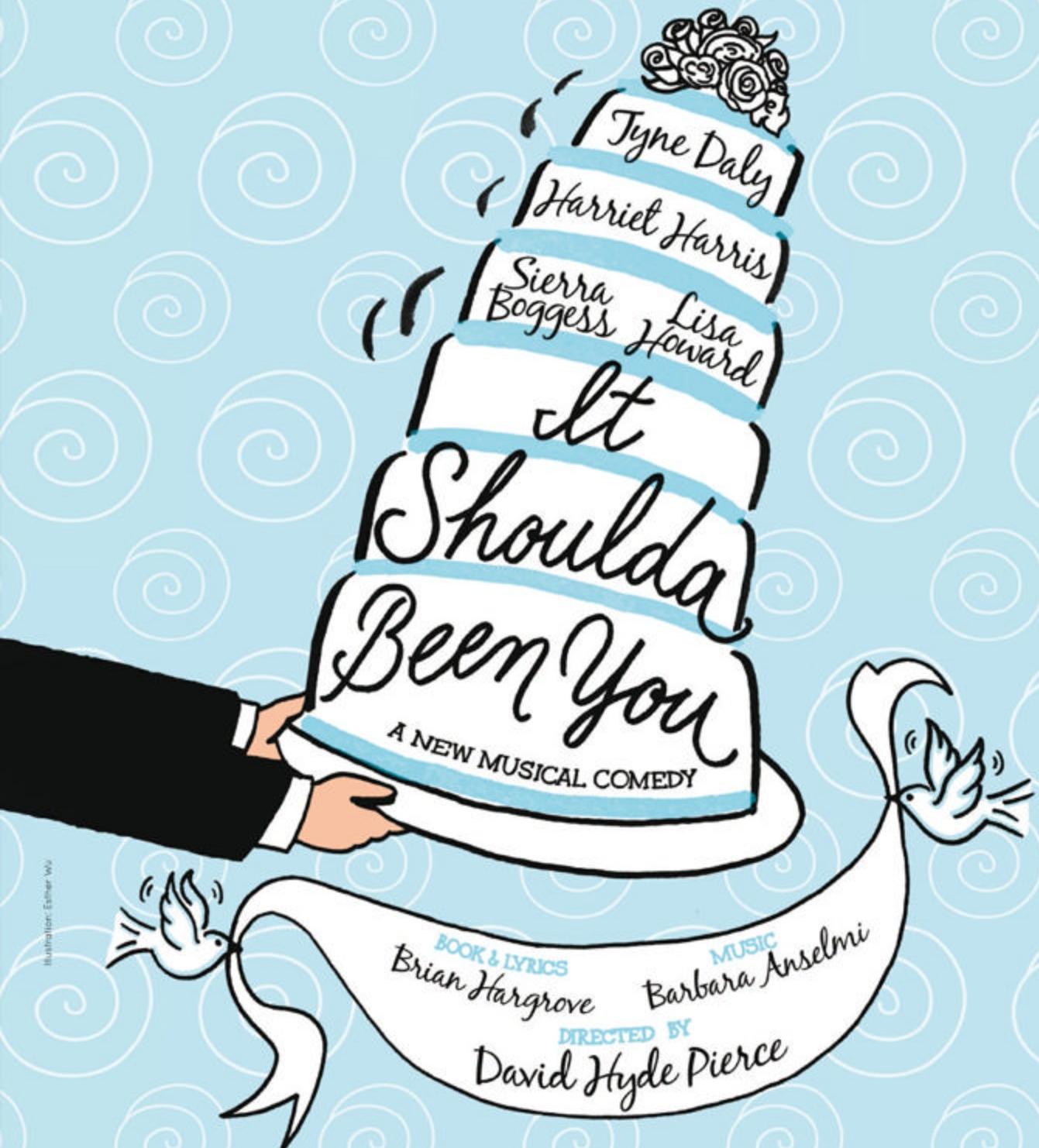


Illustration: Esther Wu

BOOK & LYRICS Brian Hargrove MUSIC Barbara Anselmi
DIRECTED BY David Hyde Pierce
WITH DAVID BURTKA MONTEGO GLOVER CHIP ZIEN
JOSH GRISSETTI ADAM HELLER MICHAEL X. MARTIN ANNE L. NATHAN NICK SPANGLER
AND EDWARD HIBBERT

BROADWAY PREVIEWS BEGIN MARCH 17

Brooks Atkinson Theatre, 256 W. 47th Street (Between Broadway & 8th Avenue)
Ticketmaster.com 877-250-2929 ItShouldaBeenYou.com

Cinema." March 13 at 2, 5, and 8: "In Cold Blood" (1967, Richard Brooks). • March 14 at 6:45 and 9:30: "The Elephant Man" (1980, David Lynch). • March 15 at 4 and 9:15: "Bunny Lake Is Missing." • March 15 at 6:15: "Advise and Consent" (1962, Otto Preminger).

FILM FORUM

In revival. March 13-19 (call for showtimes): "The Tales of Hoffmann" (1951, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger). • The films of D. W. Griffith. March 16 at 7: "Sally of the Sawdust."

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 12 at 9:30: "Gaby Baby Doll" (2014, Sophie Letourneur). • March 13 at 2 and March 14 at 6: "Party Girl." • March 14 at 9: "Fidelio, Alice's Odyssey" (2014, Lucie Borleteau). • March 15 at 4: "Portrait of the Artist" (2014, Antoine Barraud).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

The films of Benoît Jacquot. March 17 at 4: "Villa Amalia." • March 17 at 7:30: "A Tout de Suite" (2004).

IFC CENTER

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 12 at 6: "40-Love" (2014, Stéphane Demoustier). • March 12 at 8:10: "Party Girl."

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The films of Wim Wenders. March 11 at 6:15: "Paris, Texas" (1984). • March 13 at 4: "Wings of Desire" (1987). • March 13 at 7 and March 15 at 6: "Faraway, So Close!" (1993). • March 14 at 7:30: "The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick" (1971). • March 17 at 1:45: "Alice in the Cities."

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"Required Viewing: 'Mad Men's Movie Influences." March 14-15 at 5:30: "North by Northwest" (1959, Alfred Hitchcock).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of William Greaves's "Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One," from 1968, in our digital edition and online.

opposite sides of a Formula One race. Smith is breezy, canny, understated, and Robbie hides scalpel-sharp wiles behind a poker face, but the writers and directors, Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, submerge the stars' easy chemistry in a murky stew of clever yet absurd plot twists of a nearly superheroic hyperbole. That sound you hear is the high-fives in the writers' room, and that, unfortunately, is where the filmmakers' focus remains. With Adrian Martinez, as an able accomplice with no verbal filter, and Gerald McRaney, as a crusty arm-twister with pride in his craft.—R.B. (In wide release.)

Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem

Ronit Elkabetz is warmly admired but still too little known outside her native Israel. Her work as an actress, in such films as "Late Marriage" and "The Band's Visit," suggests that in her ability to compel and hold the eye she has few rivals; her blending of intensity and containment brings to mind the prime of Meryl Streep. Elkabetz, with her queenly profile, would make a daunting Cleopatra; there is no bathos, however, in meeting her, in this latest film, as an embattled housewife. She plays Viviane, who is seeking a divorce from Elisha (Simon Abkarian) after thirty years of marriage, not because of adultery or abuse but simply for lack of love. In her path stands rabbinical law, which demands the husband's consent—something that the saturnine Simon will not give. The movie, which is the last part of a trilogy, after "To Take a Wife" and "Seven Days," is written and directed by Elkabetz herself, together with her brother Shlomi. Almost all of the film takes place inside a courtroom, at irregular intervals over five years, but there is no sense of drag or slump; on the contrary, the action quivers with tension, impatience, comic heat, and, beneath it all, an irrepressible rage. In Hebrew.—A.L. (In limited release.)

Maps to the Stars

David Cronenberg goes to Hollywood. His latest film lands him in new territory, although the terrors and obsessions that infect his characters are familiar enough. Julianne Moore, unleashed, plays an actress named Havana, who is both plagued by visions of her late mother (Sarah Gadon) and hellbent on grabbing a role in a forthcoming quasi-remake of a movie for which her mother was famous. No less fretful are Stafford Weiss (John Cusack), a self-help guru, and his wife, Christina (Olivia Williams), who can barely cope with their son Benjie (Evan Bird), already a star—and almost a monster—at thirteen. Then there is Havana's assistant, Agatha (Mia Wasikowska), freshly arrived in Los Angeles and bearing the scars not just of a fire but

also of deeper traumas within. What matters here is not the plot, such as it is, but the unsavory knowledge that everything we see—the movie industry, the family unit—is coiled and bent in on itself. Hints of incest and conflagration abound, and the young refer to anybody older than themselves as "menopausal." Cronenberg eases through this damaged landscape with his usual aplomb, neither blinking nor shrinking; by the end, despite that composure, you can't wait to get out of town. With Robert Pattinson, as a chauffeur. Written by Bruce Wagner.—A.L. (3/9/15) (In limited release.)

Party Girl

This electrifying blend of documentary and fiction draws straightforward dramatic power from tangled relationships on camera and off. Angélique Litzenburger portrays herself, a raven-haired, middle-aged, heavily bejeweled hostess at a German strip club. Her frequent client Michel Henrich (Joseph Bour), a retired French miner from just across the border, proposes to marry her, and the core of the plot involves her effort to surmount her own misgivings. The tempestuous Angélique is a mighty force of nature and a study in trouble. She has a mean streak and a hard past, and, in an effort to overcome both and to make a new life with Michel, she circles the wagons, bringing together her four real-life children—including Samuel Theis, one of the film's co-directors, and her teen-age daughter, who has been in foster care for ten years. A seasoned performer, Angélique is an instant, screen-grabbing star, and her family and friends are relaxed and captivating in their supporting roles as themselves. Theis and the other directors, Marie Amachoukeli and Claire Burger, build a grand and rumbling tale from Angélique's daily struggles at home and at work. Their intimate revelations of erotic crises and eye for symbolic details suggest a Maupassant story for modern times. In French and German.—R.B. (IFC Center, March 12; Film Society of Lincoln Center, March 13-14.)

Sally of the Sawdust

In this rowdy yet sweet-toned comic melodrama of carnival life, from 1925, D. W. Griffith yokes the cinema's youth to the age-old lore of the wandering trouper. The wide-eyed, impulsive Carol Dempster stars as a circus orphan, born in the proverbial trunk to an heiress who ran off with a showman and was disowned. Raised by "Professor" McGargle (W. C. Fields, in his first starring role), a magician, pickpocket, and shell-game sharper with a heart of gold, Sally becomes his fiercely devoted sidekick—and thinks she's his biological daughter. Griffith revels in his actors' slapstick aptitude, combining low comedy with a romantic drama involving

an upright scion (Alfred Lunt, in one of his few film appearances) who discerns Sally's natural nobility through her greasepaint and antics. Harsh scenes of Sally scuffling along train tracks for want of fare contrast with her near-metaphysical transformation into a grande dame for a salon entertainment. Griffith rarely displayed the range of his genius as comprehensively or as generously. Silent.—R.B. (Film Forum; March 16.)

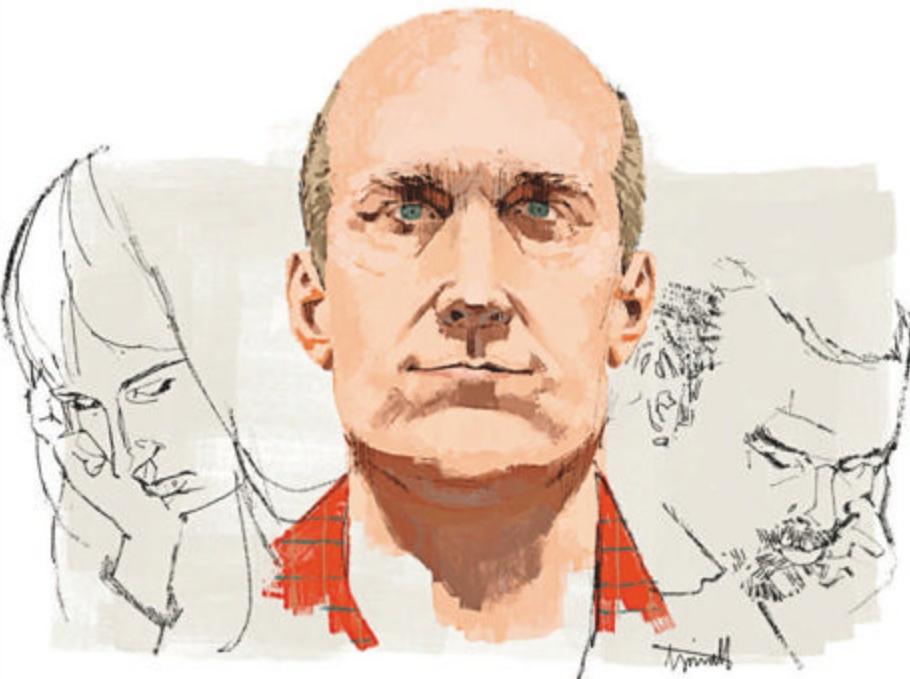
71

A raw young soldier (Jack O'Connell) on his first deployment in the British Army, during the year of the title, is separated from his platoon and stranded in unfriendly territory on the darkening streets of Belfast. O'Connell has few lines of dialogue, and his near-silence adds to his air of bewilderment, and to our sympathy for his plight. The hero falls back on his training and his wits, but they can bear him only so far through this alien zone. The writer, Gregory Burke, and the director, Yann Demange, deliberately steep us in the murk of sectarianism and the tangled stratagems of undercover agents—so much so that viewers hoping to learn about the early years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland may emerge from the film more perplexed than they were at the start. Much of the movie is implausible, if you stop to think about it; yet you don't stop, so stealthily do its shadows draw you in.—A.L. (3/9/15) (In limited release.)

Villa Amalia

This taut melodramatic fantasy, from 2009, radiates hot passions through Isabelle Huppert's coolly controlled acting. She plays Eliane Hidelstein, a pianist and composer who performs under the apt name of Ann Hidden. The musician is knocked off course by the discovery that her longtime lover Thomas (Xavier Beauvois) is seeing another woman, and by her coincidental reunion with Georges (Jean-Hugues Anglade), a long-unseen childhood friend. Suddenly, Ann changes her life: she sells her apartment and her car, closes her bank account, ditches her cell phone, and wanders through Western Europe's provincial towns and remote landscapes. Ultimately, she holes up in the villa of the title, a handmade cottage on a mountainside of an Italian island with a majestic view of the sea. But her troubled past, and the traumas of modern European history, burst in and impose mournful structure on her romantic solitude. Huppert's laser-like gaze seems to tone and sharpen the director Benoît Jacquot's images. He applies weighty backstory with a light touch, sketches sumptuous settings with painterly specificity, and reveals, with a thrilling briskness and a breathless admiration, the negative power of a life made into art. In French and Italian.—R.B. (French Institute Alliance Française; March 17.)

THE THEATRE



Jim Fletcher stars in "The Evening," presented by New York City Players, at the Kitchen.

DYNAMIC DUO

Richard Maxwell has found his Robert De Niro.

FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, THE ACTOR Jim Fletcher has worked with the important theatre director and writer Richard Maxwell, whose shows require an uncommon degree of silence from the performers. In a Maxwell work—his fourteenth full-length piece, “The Evening,” premières at the Kitchen on March 12, co-presented by Performance Space 122—part of the story is what the characters don’t say as they walk, measuredly, from one side of the stage to the other, often turning away from a fellow-performer and gazing off into the distance, as though dreaming of someplace else. When Fletcher looks out into space, he can communicate longing, certainly, while making sure that we also see his Rodin-like solidity, which refutes the adolescent jumpiness or feyness that most leading men convey on and off Broadway.

Born in 1963 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Fletcher has worked with a diverse array of artists, from the theatre collective Elevator Repair Service (he played Gatsby in the epic “Gatz”) to the choreographer Sarah Michelson. When the actor, who is usually a head or two taller than the other players, takes the stage, you know you’re in for something interesting: sexiness, sometimes, a sense of tragedy and humor for sure, but also a cogent dissection of masculinity, with a focus on the discord between what a man looks like and what he feels.

“The Evening” is a Dante-inspired work about maleness (Maxwell’s father died while he was writing it), in which a martial artist and his manager discuss broken dreams while a young woman with a checkered past tends bar. The three-person cast includes Brian Mendes and the sculptor Cammisa Buerhaus; Fletcher plays the manager, a role that he may reprise later in the intended trilogy, of which “The Evening” is the first play. By casting Fletcher, Maxwell is being as specific as his pared-down scripts look and sound. By now, Fletcher is Maxwell’s De Niro; together, they make the most of Fletcher’s silent-movie-expressive face and the focussed drift of his mind.

—Hilton Als

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

An American in Paris

Craig Lucas wrote the book for this musical adaptation of the movie, with music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin, directed and choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon. Starring Robert Fairchild, Leanne Cope, Veanne Cox, Jill Paice, Brandon Uranowitz, and Max von Essen. Previews begin March 13. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

The Evening

Richard Maxwell and New York City Players present this new work, written and directed by Maxwell. Previews begin March 12. Opens March 15. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11.)

Finding Neverland

Diane Paulus directs a new musical based on the movie, from 2004, about the life of J. M. Barrie, with a book by James Graham and music and lyrics by Gary Barlow and Eliot Kennedy. Starring Matthew Morrison (“Glee”) and Kelsey Grammer. Previews begin March 15. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929.)

Hand to God

Steven Boyer stars in this play by Robert Askins, transferring to Broadway after a successful Off Broadway run, in which a shy Christian boy at a puppet ministry is shocked to discover that his puppet, Tyrone, has a volatile personality. Previews begin March 14. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

It Shoulda Been You

Tyne Daly, Harriet Harris, Lisa Howard, and Sierra Boggess star in this new musical comedy, directed by David Hyde Pierce, in which two very different families clash at the wedding of their children. With a book and lyrics by Brian Hargrove and music by Barbara Anselmi. Previews begin March 17. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

The King and I

Kelli O’Hara and Ken Watanabe star in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical, based on the novel “Anna and the King of Siam,” by Margaret Landon, set in eighteen-sixties Bangkok. A British schoolteacher contends with the King of Siam, whose children she tutors. Bartlett Sher directs the Lincoln Center Theatre production. Previews begin March 12. (Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

Skylight

Carey Mulligan and Bill Nighy reprise their roles in the play by David Hare, after a run in London last year. Stephen Daldry directs the drama, in which a young teacher is visited by her former lover, a restaurateur whose wife has just died. Previews begin March 13. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

The Audience

Helen Mirren stars in this play, by Peter Morgan, about Queen Elizabeth II. Stephen Daldry directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Brooklynite

Ten years ago, an asteroid struck Brooklyn, giving six hipsters superhuman powers, which they’ve since used to transform the borough into a kind of Eden. But there’s trouble in paradise when the least powerful of the superheroes, Avenging Angelo (Nick Cordero), decides to turn his limited gifts against the people of Kings County, at the same

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time that the most powerful of the six, the airborne Astrolass (Nicolette Robinson), quits the group to become an average girl. What's wonderful about Peter Lerman and Michael Mayer's musical cartoon is the love story between Astrolass and a mortal store clerk, Trey Swieskowski (Matt Doyle), who wants nothing more than to have the power to save lives; when they sing Lerman's wistful love songs, it's as if they were angels rather than superheroes. Unfortunately, the silly Avenging Angelo subplot renders the work mediocre. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

Fashions for Men

The phrase "generous to a fault" could easily have been coined to describe Peter Juhász, the openhearted but foolish main character in Ferenc Molnár's 1917 comedy, receiving a delightful revival under Davis McCallum's direction at the Mint, with the original English translation niftily spruced up by the company's artistic director, Jonathan Bank. Juhász (Joe Delafield) is the owner of a high-end clothing store in Budapest (exquisitely realized by Daniel Zimmerman's set and appointed by Joshua Yocom's props). He's on the brink of professional and personal ruin as nearly everyone in his circle—customers, employees, wife—takes brutal advantage of his good nature, praising him while bleeding him dry. Delafield may be a bit too young for the role, but he projects a confidence turning to confusion, resignation, and bitterness that is truly touching. The cleverly structured play has good, satiric fun at its tender center, with especially fine comic turns provided by Kurt Rhoads, as the shopkeeper's noble patron, and by Jeremy Lawrence, as a loyal long-time employee who hears, sees, and knows all. (311 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111.)

Fish in the Dark

Larry David stars in this comedy, which he wrote. Anna D. Shapiro directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Hamilton

Lin-Manuel Miranda's complicated, valuable musical, directed by Thomas Kail, does everything it can to stand outside the American-musical canon—and then doesn't. The Founding Fathers Aaron Burr (Leslie Odom, Jr.) and Thomas Jefferson (Daveed Diggs), along with George Washington's aide-de-camp John Laurens (Anthony Ramos) and Hamilton (Miranda), in eighteenth-century-style knee breeches and waistcoats, rap and sing about Hamilton's beginnings. Then it's 1776, and America is struggling for independence from King George III (the take-no-prisoners Brian d'Arcy James). Once Hamilton works his way into Washington's inner circle, becomes the Treasury Secretary, and meets his future wife, the rich and socially prominent Eliza Schuyler (played by the gentle and dull Phillipa Soo), the show's radicalism is slowly drained, and the resulting corpse is a conventional musical. By burying his trickster-quick take on race, immigrant ambition, colonialism, and masculinity under a commonplace love story in the second half of the show, Miranda hides what he most needs to display: his talent. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/9/15.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

John & Jen

In the first act of this Keen Company revival of Andrew Lippa and Tom Greenwald's 1995 two-person musical, John (Conor Ryan) and his older sister Jen (Kate Baldwin) are growing up in the fifties and sixties with an abusive father. They make a pact to always stick together, and then Jen breaks the pact, with tragic results. In the second act, Jen, now grown up, vows not to make the same

mistake twice, and nearly suffocates her young son (Ryan, in a double role), also named John, with her overbearing attention. Under the direction of Jonathan Silverstein, Baldwin and Ryan are superb in this tiny but powerful musical. They both give funny, nuanced performances, and the result is a moving portrayal of how deeply family members can love and hurt one another. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

Little Children Dream of God

Jeff Augustin has written a sprawling play, which the director Giovanna Sardelli and her crew have innovatively and expertly fit into an intimate space. It's part fable, part thriller, part romance, part ghost story, and it endeavors to explore big philosophical questions in a setting both mundane and supernatural. Sula (Carra Patterson), following a harrowing journey from Haiti, finds her way to an apartment building in Miami, where she promptly gives birth to the baby she's been carrying for eleven months. She's aided by Carolyn (Deirdre O'Connell), another resident, who credits the paternity of her eleven children to God. Sula's newborn is healthy but "creepy," everyone agrees, and Sula worries that he has been infected by a vodun curse she has carried from her homeland. This leads to a theological debate between the two women, just one of many unexpected encounters pulled off by the fine cast. Most affecting, perhaps, are the interactions between Carolyn, a plainspoken health-care worker, and Manuel (Gilbert Cruz), a bitter, lonely terminal case. In the hands of these two accomplished actors, the characters give as good as they get, illuminating the heart of the play. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

Rocket to the Moon

Clifford Odets's 1938 drama, directed by Dan Wackerman, opens with Ben Stark (Ned Eisenberg), a bighearted Manhattan dentist, promising his bitter, controlling wife (Marilyn Matarrese) that he won't expand his practice—something that would be financially risky but emotionally fulfilling. It's not much of a surprise, then, that Stark soon falls in love with his beautiful nineteen-year-old dental assistant (Katie McClellan), and is torn between his worn-out commitments and his dreams. Though Eisenberg, in his late fifties, does an excellent job playing an American Everyman in hard times in this Peccadillo production, he's too old to play a good guy who'd seriously consider running off with a teen-ager. McClellan, however, is perfectly cast as a young woman so full of life and hope that she makes most of the downtrodden men around her feel alive and hopeful, too. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 866-811-4111.)

The World of Extreme Happiness

China's one-child policy was enacted in 1980, and the most shocking, insidious effect was the subsequent widespread subordination, neglect, and even murder of baby girls. So when Sunny (Jennifer Lim) is born to a peasant family at the start of Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's play, in 1992, her mere survival is something of a miracle. Twenty years later, she is plying a soul-killing factory job in the city of Shenzhen, sending money home so that her younger brother (there were loopholes in the policy) can go to school. Directed by Eric Ting, the production attempts to lighten Sunny's grim journey through a society and an economy heavily stacked against her, with comic supporting characters and parallel references to the adventures of the beloved Chinese literary character the Monkey King. But, ultimately, the dialogue—formal, stilted, and sympathy-resistant—works against it. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC



DANCE OF DEATH

Thomas Adès's latest work is a meditation on an ancient theme.

THE BRITISH COMPOSER THOMAS ADÈS, who will conduct the American première of his vocal-orchestral work "Totentanz" with the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall (March 12-14), is still a relatively young man, having just turned forty-four. Yet he is securely established as a modern master, each new piece assuming the trappings of an event. Such a reputation could easily lead to professional caution, to an audience-savvy recycling of familiar gestures. Fortunately, Adès's latest creations are anything but circumspect: they are wilder, stranger, and bolder than the intricate, insolent scores with which he first made his name, in the nineteen-nineties. The opening bars of "Totentanz" give us winds shrieking in their upper registers, hectoring brass, whistles and whipcracks from the percussion section, and a splattered G-major chord that lands like a dissonance. It is a sound at once grand and gaudy, majestic and mordant.

The music fits the subject. "Totentanz," which is scored for mezzo-soprano (Christianne Stotijn), baritone (Mark Stone), and orchestra, is a setting of an anonymous text that appeared alongside a frieze by the fifteenth-century German artist Bernt Notke—a cavalcade of figures both exalted and humble, their arms linked by prancing skeletons. The frieze, housed in the Marienkirche in Lübeck, was destroyed by Allied bombs in 1942, but a photograph preserves its macabre wit, as does the poem. ("The more you gain promotion, / The more your life's uncertain," Death says to the Parish Clerk.) Fifteen people, from an imperious Pope to a helpless infant, go successively to their doom. The procession is structured so that it never feels episodic; a symphonic continuity ties the character sketches together, and a violent, splenetic climax erupts in the wake of the comeuppance of the Merchant.

As Death moves down the social scale, the tempo slows, the orchestra thins out, and lyricism comes to the fore. Adès drops his caustic mien when he portrays those without power: a young maiden is accompanied by crystalline harp and piano, by murmuring winds, by an air of heartbreak. The final section, "Death and the Child," enters the realm of Mahler's "Wunderhorn" songs, a shivery, shadowy D major. But the orchestra delves into regions darker and grimier than Mahler's—the sub-crypt of a ruined world.

—Alex Ross

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Photograph of Rosa Parks seated on a bus, silver print; circa 1960s. Estimate \$350 to \$500.

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OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Originally seen in 2007, “*Lucia di Lammermoor*” was the first of three Met productions by Mary Zimmerman, and its deeply contextualized stagings have aroused very mixed feelings among devoted opera-goers. But this one, with its Victorian-era setting, has proved to be a worthy survivor. The latest revival features Albina Shagimuratova, who has appeared several times at the house as Mozart’s Queen of the Night, in the title role, with the honey-voiced tenor Joseph Calleja as her beloved and Luca Salsi as her disapproving brother; Maurizio Benini conducts. (March 16 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** The Bartlett Sher production of “*Les Contes d’Hoffmann*,” already revived this season as an effective vehicle for the young superstar tenor Vittorio Grigolo, returns with a completely new cast, led by the Met’s éminence grise, James Levine. The fine lyric tenor Matthew Polenzani takes the title role; Karine Deshayes is Nicklausse; Laurent Naouri sings the Four Villains; and Audrey Luna, Susanna Phillips, and Elena Maximova portray the ill-fated subjects of Hoffmann’s erotic obsessions. (March 11 and March 14 at 8.) • Vittorio Grigolo makes a second foray into French opera this season by singing Des Grieux in Massenet’s “*Manon*,” an extraordinarily lithe and sumptuous score. The sparkling Diana Damrau is Manon, one of opera’s most headstrong and reckless young women, and Russell Braun is Lescaut; Emmanuel Villaume. (March 12 and March 17 at 7:30.) • Rossini’s

exceedingly lovely “*La Donna del Lago*” has made a belated entry into the annals of the Met, and, with such singers as Joyce DiDonato, Juan Diego Flórez, John Osborn, and Daniela Barcellona in the leading roles, it is well worth hearing. Michele Mariotti leads the orchestra with quicksilver grace. (March 14 at 1. This is the final performance.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Venice Baroque Orchestra

Chris Thile is not the world’s only superstar mandolin player; Avi Avital, solidly educated in the classical tradition, is a worthy competitor. He comes to Carnegie’s Zankel Hall with the wonderful Italian orchestra, whose rough-edged elegance reflects the spirit of the city from which it hails. Concertos by Marcello, Geminiani, Paisiello, and Vivaldi (including “Summer,” from “The Four Seasons”) are on the program. (212-247-7800. March 11 at 7:30.)

TENET

The esteemed early-music choral ensemble, singing one on a part this time, teams up with the singer and organist Eric Dudley (also a member of Roomful of Teeth) to perform a Lenten concert, the book of motets for Holy Saturday by the eccentric and deeply expressive Renaissance master Gesualdo. The vocal movements will be interspersed, in authentic style, with improvisational organ solos. (Good Shepherd Church, 152 W. 66th St. tenetnyc.com. March 12 at 7.)

American Classical Orchestra

In an exceptionally meaty program, the excellent period-performance orchestra, its chorus, and its conductor, Thomas Crawford, offer three hunks of Classical-era repertory: Schubert’s Ninth Symphony, the “Great”; Mozart’s Mass in C Major, “Coronation”; and an excerpt from Beethoven’s oratorio “Christ on the Mount of Olives” (along with the “Egmont” Overture). The vocal soloists include the soprano Sherezade Panthaki and the tenor Marc Molomot. (Alice Tully Hall. lincolncenter.org. March 12 at 8.)

RECITALS

Alina Ibragimova: the Bach Solo Sonatas and Partitas

Ibragimova, an impressive young violinist currently making the rounds of the great European orchestras, takes on four of the six masterworks (including the Partita in D Minor, with the “Chaconne”) in a thrice-repeated concert at the Park Avenue Armory’s lovingly restored Board of Officers Room. (Park Ave. at 66th St. armoryonpark.org. March 10-11 at 7:30 and March 13-14 at 8.)

Sasha Cooke and Julius Drake

The radiant American mezzo-soprano, now entering mid-career, joins the eminent accompanist in a recital that moves confidently across the centuries, showcasing songs by Haydn, Liszt, Mahler (“Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen”), Granados, and Kevin Puts (the world première of “Of All the Moons”). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 12 at 7:30.)

Miller Theatre: “Michael Gordon + Bach”

The “Bach, Revisited” series at Columbia University selects composers who, in their highly individual ways, amplify the stylistic parameters of the Master’s work. Gordon, a post-minimalist composer of enduring gifts (and a founder of Bang on a Can), will enjoy performances of his works “Hyper” and “Dry” by Ensemble Signal and guest artists, who also turn their attention to two Bach concertos (including the Harpsichord Concerto in G Minor, BWV 1058, with Kristian Bezuidenhout). (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. March 12 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

The Escher String Quartet, a finely calibrated young American ensemble, takes the big stage at Alice Tully Hall, performing three especially introspective works by Schubert (the Quartet No. 13 in A Minor, “Rosamunde”), Sibelius (“Voices Intimae”), and Berg (the “Lyric Suite”). (212-875-5788. March 15 at 5.)

The Piano Music of Pierre Boulez

A concert of the grand master of modernism’s music for keyboard should draw a league of apostles to Zankel Hall this week. In advance of Boulez’s ninetieth birthday, two formidable virtuosos, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Tamara Stefanovich, perform nearly all of it, including Book II of “Structures” (for two pianos) and all three of the Sonatas for Piano. (212-247-7800. March 16 at 7:30.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

NYC Craft Beer Festival:

Spring Seasonal

The craft-beer revival is like a happy hour that never ends—this is the tenth edition of the biannual event. Driven by a renewed interest in the fermented beverage, the gathering features seventy-five breweries from around the nation. More than a hundred and fifty brews will be available for tasting, with an emphasis on seasonal and limited releases. Artisanal food, music from the High and Mighty Brass Band, and cocktail-making tips from Jonathan Pogash will also be on tap. (Lexington Avenue Armory, 68 Lexington Ave. handcraftedtasting.com. March 13-14.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The New York auction circuit embarks on a week of Asian art sales, a category encompassing everything from Himalayan mandalas to Ming

bowls. **Christie’s** sales begin on March 15, with a two-day spread of Chinese ceramics, followed by a group of seventeenth-century Chinese porcelains from a private collection on March 16. (The house will host a symposium on the subject of seventeenth-century porcelains on March 14.) But the highlight of the week is the first installment of a five-part jamboree devoted to the holdings of the late Robert Hatfield Ellsworth, a.k.a. “The King of Ming,” on March 17. The better to showcase the collection of this prominent scholar and dealer—whose treasures include priceless thirteenth-century Buddhist and Hindu bronzes, Chinese furniture, and Japanese screens—the house will recreate interiors from his art-filled, twenty-room Fifth Avenue apartment in its galleries. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • **Sotheby’s** covers much of the same ground in

four auctions on March 17, beginning with a sale of Indian, Himalayan, and Southeast Asian Art—particularly rich in Indian miniatures—from the collection of the late Claus Virch. (Virch was a sometime curator of nineteenth-century and European paintings at the Metropolitan Museum.) This is followed by Chinese art and porcelain, including a particularly handsome ivory-colored

READINGS AND TALKS

“A Celebration of International Poetry”

The Poetry Society of America inaugurates this new series, with an event presented in collaboration with the Polish Cultural Institute of New York. The Polish poet Tomasz Różycki will be joined by his translator, Mira Rosenthal, as well as by the American poet Matthew Rohrer. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. poetrysociety.org. March 11 at 7.)

92nd Street Y

The food writer Mimi Sheraton, a contributor to this magazine, whose latest book is “1,000 Foods to Eat Before You Die,” talks with the restaurateur Danny Meyer about their culinary bucket lists. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 11 at 7:30.)



TABLES FOR TWO

CAFÉ CLOVER

10 Downing St. (212-675-4350)

IN A CITY WHERE YOU could theoretically eat a different preparation of pork belly every night, there are two things that might make Café Clover a tough sell. The first is that the menu was designed with the help of a nutritionist aiming to shave off calories wherever possible. The second is that this temple of wellness is situated at Manhattan's most vexed spot, at least for restaurants: the corner of Sixth Ave. and Downing St., where a triangular room with the feel of a cruise-ship bow has thwarted the ambition of so many chefs.

The oddly shaped space has been made to look as lovely as it can be; Aegean-blue banquets help. And, sure enough, all the usual health foods are in attendance: flax, chia, sunflower seeds. In fact, these three are combined into an aggressively gluten-free cracker, served in lieu of bread, with butternut-squash hummus. Whence the cracker's binding agent? Hard to say, because it disintegrates into a hundred tiny pieces when subjected to the mildest of stress tests: a dip. As long as you're prepared to eat your vegetables, and then eat them again, the meal picks up from there, with a memorably sweet tarragon dressing on a gem-wedge salad; baby beets and apples toughened up with hardy little sprigs of lovage; the unexpected addition of blood orange to ribbons of kale. That there's a bowl of the distinctly unglamorous celery root on almost every table, tossed with rutabaga in an Indian-inspired dressing, is a testament to the power of cumin to make just about anything interesting.

Sometimes the judicious distribution of calories renders things a little flat: halibut quivering like a poached egg on grilled salsify tasted as white as it looked, and, even though it would make things easier for everyone, spaghetti squash is never going to convincingly stand in for pasta. (It comes with organic Scottish salmon and black-trumpet mushrooms.) "Thoughtfully portioned options," says the bottom of the menu, which sounds vaguely threatening, even Bloombergian, but turns out to be just fine, really—how much more of the cauliflower "steak" in a pool of romesco do you want? Even if most diners are there to feel better about eating out after SoulCycle or ModelFit, the kitchen's use of unusual ingredients guarantees a worthwhile discovery or two. White lentils, for instance, in a truffle risotto. Or teff, from Ethiopia, served as a remarkably light multilayered crêpe cake, making a persuasive case for toppling quinoa as ancient grain of choice. The cake comes with an excellent mascarpone mousse and an espresso chocolate sauce. Enjoy in moderation.

—Amelia Lester

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FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB LIVINGSTON MANOR

42 Hoyt St., Brooklyn (347-987-3292)

New York abounds with old things made new—just consider this storefront on Hoyt Street, in downtown Brooklyn. Some sixty years ago, it was the Garfield luncheonette, where bemused detectives once watched a thief crawl over the transom with sixteen eggs in his pockets and a slice of cake jammed in his mouth. More recently, the site belonged to a bodega—narrow, dusty, smelling of cat food—adjacent to a one-stop shop where checks are cashed, shoes repaired, and keys copied. The latter establishment remains (basic needs endure), but recently it was out with the bodega and in with the craft-beer-and-cocktail joint. The bar is named for both nearby Livingston Street and the Catskill trout-fishing hamlet where the Manor's owner, Matt Roff (also of the Crown Inn and Franklin Park), vacationed as a child. "The vibe within the bar is a marriage of old school and new school, semi-modern meets semi-antique," Roff said the other day. So it is that such throwbacks as wood reclaimed from a Virginia elementary school and a bourbon-and-ginger-spiked egg cream called the Bugsville Fizz coexist with neoteric features like a hearty dark lager from Catskill Brewery (est. 2014), a duck-rillettes banh mi, and a woman guilelessly confessing, "I never really got into 'Seinfeld,' I think because I was too young."

—Emma Allen





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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

ATOMIC CLOCKS

In 1950, Bruno Pontecorvo, an Italian physicist who had been working on British and Canadian nuclear projects, vanished while vacationing on the Mediterranean. As Frank Close writes in a new book about him, "Half-Life," Pontecorvo wasn't heard from again until 1955, when he resurfaced in Russia. There were many wild rumors about what he was working on for the Soviets, among them an "atomic fog." But Freeman Dyson, reviewing the biography in *The New York Review of Books*, asks how much rogue physicists like Pontecorvo really mattered: "Perhaps the spies accelerated the production of the first Soviet bombs by two or three years, but those bombs soon became obsolete and were superseded by new designs invented without the help of spies."

Dyson, as a physicist, must appreciate that the significance of two or three years in the life of a nuclear-weapons program can be relative. Last Tuesday, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, speaking to a joint session of Congress, at the invitation of John Boehner, the Speaker of the House, dismissed a potential deal that the Obama Administration is pursuing, which would effectively keep Iran from having the means to build a bomb for ten or fifteen years. The time gained would be meaningless if Iran was not first fundamentally incapacitated and transformed, Netanyahu said. "A decade may seem like a long time in political life, but it's the blink of an eye in the life of a nation." (The two weeks between Netanyahu's speech and the Israeli elections may seem like an indecorously short time in political life.) Speaking about Iran's "tentacles" and its "gobbling up" of other countries, he suggested that President Obama didn't know what he was doing. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who shook her head as she watched the speech (more than fifty Democrats stayed away), said that she was "saddened by the insult to the intelligence of the United States."

And yet, despite Netanyahu's posturing, there is a serious question about time-

lines. For several years, Iran has been said to be one, two, or three years away from having the capacity to build a bomb. The Administration's goal is to prevent it from getting any closer. The rough outline of the deal, judging from leaks and the Administration's briefings, is that Iran would allow intrusive inspections, limit its nuclear-fuel-production capacity, and give up fuel stockpiles. In return, the United States and its allies would lift sanctions. The deal, reportedly, would have a ten- or fifteen-year sunset clause, although the State Department has indicated that some improvements in inspections would remain. From Netanyahu's point of view, Iran would then be able to pick up where it left off, and from a position of greater strength, with its economy "unshackled," as he put it. Iran has cheated before and might try to again (although a deal would make it easier to detect any covert programs), and it could still be sponsoring militias and terror. There are legitimate concerns, but one thing that Netanyahu did not present was any real alternative to the deal.

"Folks, simply demanding that Iran capitulate is not a plan," Secretary of State John Kerry said, after Netanyahu's speech. He was in Montreux, Switzerland, where he and other

representatives of the P5+1 (the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany) were engaged in talks with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif. Obama spoke of America's "unbreakable" bond with Israel, but he, too, emphasized that the deal was the best way to stop a bomb—"Nothing else comes close. Sanctions won't do it. Even military action would not be as successful."

A problem with the anti-diplomacy position is the one that Dyson confronts: building a bomb has ceased to be a great puzzle; nuclear programs no longer rely on physicists disappearing mysteriously from Italian beaches. When Netanyahu said that the deal, by freeing Iran to be more "aggressive," would "spark a nuclear



arms race" in the region, he was acknowledging that there are any number of countries that, without too much difficulty, could acquire a nuclear bomb if they had the money and the political will. (Saudi Arabia, certainly, has the budget.) At worst, hostile disruptions of the Iranian program could accelerate it by pushing the country's leaders to abandon the restraints Iran has already accepted. At best, they would do on a small scale something that a deal would do better—create more time.

A key concept in the negotiations is "breakout time"; that is, how quickly Iran could assemble the materials for a bomb if it reneged on a deal. Mostly, this is a question of obtaining enriched uranium, or having the centrifuges to produce it. The more centrifuges a country has spinning, the shorter the breakout time. At the moment, Iran has about nineteen thousand, which it says serve only civilian energy needs; the expectation is that a deal would reduce that number, so that the breakout time would be a year or more.

Breakout time is a concept that might also be applied to politics. What difference can two or three—or ten or fifteen—years make? Between 1949, when the Soviet Union tested its first crude fission bomb, and 1953, when it exploded a hydrogen bomb (perhaps with help from Pontecorvo) the leadership shifted from Stalin to Khrushchev. The years from 1982 to 1991 saw four general secretaries—from Brezhnev to Gor-

bachev—and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In Iran, the relationship between Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani, whose election held some promise for reformers, is opaque, though Rouhani seems to be pushing the talks. The terms are relative here, too; last week, Rouhani called Israel a warmonger. But the world made it through the decades of the Cold War in large measure because of imperfect arms agreements with dubious partners. If we rely only on financial and military threats, nonproliferation will fail.

In an indication of the complexity of the moment, Iran and the United States have a shared goal in Iraq: to take the city of Tikrit back from ISIS. Netanyahu warned Congress not to be "fooled" into thinking that Iran could be a friend in this fight. "One calls itself the Islamic Republic. The other calls itself the Islamic State," he said. "In this deadly game of thrones, there's no place for America or for Israel." On the way back from Montreux, Kerry stopped in Riyadh, in part to reassure the Saudis about the operations in Iraq. (The Saudis oppose ISIS, but they, like ISIS, are Sunni, and Iran is Shiite.) If a deal were to be struck, all the other challenges related to Iran would remain, Kerry said, "except that we will have taken steps to guarantee that Iran will not have a nuclear weapon." At least, for a useful period of time.

—Amy Davidson

WHO GOES THERE? ALIAS



Three Fridays ago at Balthazar, the SoHo brasserie, a large clouded-glass mirror detached from a wall landed on some people who were having breakfast. One of them was a man—debonair, in a fine scarf and a dark coat—who identified himself to police officers responding to a 911 call as Arnaud Française. He was wheeled out of the restaurant on a gurney and taken to Bellevue. Doctors examined him; he was unharmed. Later, it emerged that he was not M. Française but Arnaud Montebourg, until last August the French Minister of the Economy. One guesses that he tendered the false surname out of embarrassment, not wanting to be known, newly arrived on the East Coast—he was spending the week as the Syngman Rhee 1910 Lecturer at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School—as the guy who went to Balthazar and got crushed by an antique. (Instead, he will have to live down the embarrassment of having christened himself Ar-

naud Française.) One is less sure what to make of the news that Chelsea Clinton, with plenty of time to think, has been checking into hotels as Diane Reynolds, the same name under which, as the *Times* reported last week, she carried out her correspondence on clintonemail.com, her mother's private e-mail server.

You kind of want to have them all over for eggs Benedict: Charles Morin (Winston Churchill's *nom de palette*, borrowed from a recently dead landscape painter), George Fox (Eliot Spitzer's phony identity at the Mayflower Hotel), Lou Sarah (a character created by Sarah Palin to hype Sarah Palin on Facebook), Carlos Danger (Anthony Weiner's amorous alter ego), his possible relative Nick Danger (the proprietor of a secret e-mail account maintained by the former North Carolina governor Mike Easley). Politicians, like anyone, burrow into pseudonymity when they want to hide themselves or something else, when they don't want the world to know where they are or what they're doing. But, unlike the larkish handles of Hollywood celebrities, as revealed by the Sony hackers (Tom Hanks, a.k.a. Johnny Madrid; Sarah Michelle Gellar, a.k.a. Neely O'Hara), the fake names of politicians seem to yield strangely earnest self-representations. Diane Reynolds. It's so

Chelsea Victoria Clinton—less a trench-coat and sunglasses, as aliases go, than Capri pants and a hairband.

Diane Reynolds—honey, don't we know her from somewhere? Probably so. In Ashland, Ohio, she might have helped you buy a house. Fifty miles east, in Tallmadge, she may be your certified public accountant. She's an addiction counselor near Portland; a physician's assistant in Bangor; a nurse in Brooklyn; a dietetics clinical coördinator in Ypsilanti. You might have read one of her poems in the *Cortland Review*, or bought a vintage bomber jacket from her on Etsy. Diane



Chelsea Clinton

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Run Simple

Reynolds is a character in "The Day the Loving Stopped," a 1981 television movie starring Dominique Dunne and Ally Sheedy as Judy and Debbie, sisters who are upset about their parents' divorce. Diane was the eighteenth most popular baby girl's name in America in 1947, the year that Hillary Diane Rodham was born. It is unclear, though, why Chelsea chose Reynolds. Presumably, she was not memorializing the late Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, who, according to Bill Clinton, "worked hard and risked much as Taoiseach to advance the Northern Ireland peace process," or referring to the sex-offending ex-congressman Mel Reynolds, whose prison sentence was commuted by her father. Maybe she dreams of being Mrs. Ryan Reynolds. Is she in the pocket of the aluminum-foil lobby? (Chelsea Clinton Fake E-Mail Name Generator: your mother's middle name and the first thing you see when you open the kitchen drawer.) It seemed a question that only the experts could resolve.

E-mails from real Diane Reynoldses, upon being informed that Chelsea Clinton had assumed their name:

"Get out! I'm politically involved and think that's GREAT!" (Diane Reynolds, Realtor, Peabody, Massachusetts.)

"Wow!" (Diane Reynolds, wedding photographer, Dallas-Fort Worth area.)

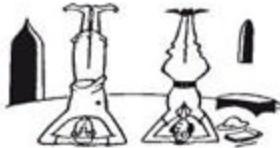
"Well, if I hadn't done a bit of research after getting your e-mail, I would have sworn this was a phishing scam!" (Diane Reynolds, family therapist, Santa Monica.)

"I am out of the office until 03/10/2015." (Diane Reynolds, Toronto, data scientist.)

There was another person in the news last week who did not use the precise name with which he was born: a thirty-two-year-old black man who, according to the Justice Department's report on the Ferguson Police Department, was sitting in his car cooling off after playing basketball. This was in 2012. An officer pulled up and demanded the man's identification; he accused him of being a pedophile, ordered him onto the pavement, and prepared to search his car. The man objected. The officer arrested him, reportedly at gunpoint. The man was charged with eight different violations, and this eventually caused him to lose his job as a government contractor. One of the charges was Making a False Declaration: his name was Michael, and he had originally given it as Mike.

—Lauren Collins

ALL-NIGHTER DEPT. OM SWEET OM



A legend: In ancient India, a noblewoman named Parvati had a crush on the god Shiva. But he wasn't open to dating. His previous wife had died, and he was an ascetic; he meditated all day

on a mountaintop, wearing only a tiger skin. Rebuffed, Parvati tried to woo him on his own terms. She took up an austerity regime—fasting, meditating for years in the wilderness. It worked. Shiva was impressed, and he came out of seclusion.

The Hindu ceremony of Shivaratri honors their marriage. Devotees fast and stay up all night to celebrate it with chanting. "It's a long haul," the yoga teacher Eddie Stern said the other day, at the Broome Street Temple, in SoHo. "But, once you get late into the night—2, 3, 4 A.M.—the whole atmosphere's pretty profound." Stern, who is pale, with a shaved head, had just arrived, late, from giving Madonna a yoga lesson. Would Madonna be coming to the ceremony? "She said she might stop by," Stern said. Stern is an expert in Ashtanga yoga, having trained with Shri K. Pattabhi Jois, who developed the technique. He founded the Hindu temple, in his Manhattan yoga studio, in 2001, to create "a little slice of India," he said. Since then, it has become an unlikely spiritual-pilgrimage site, attracting a mixture of Indians, downtown yoga ladies, and celebrities (Gwyneth Paltrow; Mike D, of the Beastie Boys; Julian Schnabel; Russell Brand). The evening's Shivaratri ceremony was bittersweet: it would be the Temple's last. The space had been sold to developers, who want to turn it into a hair salon. "It's an emotional time," Stern said. More than a hundred and fifty yogis had R.S.V.P.'d for the all-nighter, and he said they'd be drifting in and out.

It was 5 P.M., and Stern's helpers were rushing around, making chai and rice for the guests. Near the back of the room, a white-and-gold shrine, like a cabin, housed a statue of the elephant-headed god Ganesh. A Hindu priest and other robed men sat on the floor in front of a mural depicting Shiva. Stern joined them and began to chant, as a crowd showed up. First came the after-work shift: Sangita, a paralegal whose parents are from Calcutta, said that she was there because "my mom's been pushing it. I think she wants me to find a husband." Rebecca Dias, a former yoga teacher from Chelsea, said that she was hoping to bring "auspiciousness" into her life.

The robed men chanted. A *kirtan* singer played a harmonium and sang,



accompanied by her brother, on a tabla. “*Om namah Shivaya*,” many followers chanted, while others discreetly checked their Instagram accounts. During a bathroom break, one of the robed men, Neeraj Karhade, introduced himself. He works in private equity. “I learned Sanskrit as a child,” he said. “I come from a long line of priests.” Beneath his robe, he wore a black T-shirt that spelled out “Broome Street Temple” in the shape of the Ramones logo.

At twelve-thirty, Stern rang a bell. “*Hari om!*” he announced. “Here we are at the halfway point.” He spoke about the ritual, explaining that Shiva is the god of consciousness, so it makes sense to honor him with an all-nighter. “It’s a discipline to stay up all night,” he said, and retold the story of Parvati’s suffering. “At the heart of her austeries was a deep, profound love for Shiva. Discipline without love is fanaticism. And love without discipline can seem wishy-washy.” The crowd murmured its assent.

The late shift was arriving. Massimo Lobuglio, an environmentalist wearing trendy glasses, wanted to bring “more love, less B.S.” into his life. An art teacher named Suzanne said that she’d been intrigued by the ceremony’s reputation for helping women with romance. “I tried to do online dating,” she said. “But I don’t have time.” Still no Madonna.

The night marched on: more chanting, more offerings. By two-thirty, the room was full of yawns. By three-thirty, Dias looked wilted. “I’m struggling,” she said. Lobuglio slumped against a wall. At 4 A.M., there was a long bout of chanting: “*Om namah Shivaya*.” Throats grew sore. Bottoms felt numb. Even Stern seemed to be in a funk. “Real estate stresses me out,” he said, reflecting on the Temple’s relocation issues, during a chai break. (Madonna had sent her regrets at 12:46 A.M. “I just finished my rehearsal, and I’m totally exhausted,” Stern said, reading her message. “I said we’d say a prayer for her.”)

At five-fifteen, it was still dark outside. A little girl—Pranathi Bhat, the priest’s daughter—was led up to a microphone, where she rubbed her eyes and sang a song: “*Om mangalam*.” The men in robes tinkled bells and lit candles, celebrating the celestial marriage. Stern perked up. “Thank you, Lord Shiva,

for bringing us all together!” he announced. Dias was jubilant. “I’m proud that I made it this far,” she said. Lobuglio nodded. “I got a third wind!” he said. “I’m going home to catch up on e-mails.”

—Lizzie Widdicombe

UP LIFE’S LADDER

SIDEKICK



Reggie Watts is weird, but weird works for Reggie Watts. Example: his 2012 TED talk. He starts out speaking gibberish, which morphs into a British accent (“there is no time other than the collapsation of that sensation of the mirror of the memories”), and is followed by a gruff “Ya know what I’m sayin?” Ya don’t, but that’s the point. Watts, the soon-to-be house bandleader of “The Late Late Show with James Corden,” on CBS, could be called a comedian or a musician. In his signature act, he improvises monologues and songs over beats that he records onstage and loops using an effects pedal. The result is like watching a “Saturday Night Live” audition on acid.

The other day, Watts was due at the Tiger Lounge, a secret rehearsal space beneath a dive bar in Williamsburg. The room reeked of incense, its walls covered with graffiti. Watts lumbered in and bellowed to the room, “Hello, I am Lathrup McGillicutty,” but his distinctive hairdo (poufy’fro, poufy beard) gave him away. He offered a hand to shake—he keeps his pinkie nails long; one was painted red, the other black—and addressed how he’d found the place. “Fifteen years ago, I worked for a small Salisbury-steak TV-dinner-manufacturing company called Swanson’s, and they would include brownies, which would always remain kind of gooey even though you put them in the oven for a long time,” he began. “And I remember my grandmother coming over with a shawl, and she said, ‘You guys look so cozy here, but you know what would really work? You should find a place in New York,’ and so I found this place.” He blinked. His interlocutor laughed nervously. Nah, Watts said, a

friend had brought him and he’d dug the vibe. “It reminds me of Seattle, like, 1992,” he said.

Watts is forty-two years old. His full name is Reginald Lucien Frank Roger Watts. He was born in Stuttgart, Germany; his mother is French, and his father was a U.S. Air Force officer. He went to Great Falls High, in Montana. “First, I was in drama, where you find the weirdest, smartest kids and the smartest, cutest girls,” he said. “Then I tried student council and was on the football team, not because I loved football but because I wanted to experience football as a construct.” At eighteen, he moved to Seattle, and played in bands (Action Buddy, Ironing Pants Definitely, and others) before landing in New York, in 2004.

A man with Alanis Morissette hair and a handlebar mustache introduced



Reggie Watts

himself as Yazan, the Tiger Lounge’s manager. “Did you bring that?” he asked Watts, pointing to a fancy beverage.

“Yeah, man,” Watts said. “It’s all natural, Stevia-sweetened, green coffee beans, unroasted, longer prolonged energy, healthier for you. It’s dope. It’s the shit! It’s got electrolytes.” He did not sound like someone who needed more caffeine.

On his way out, Yazan said, “Watch out for that guy, on the wall over there.”

Watts stomped over. “Is it a *la cucaracha*?” He impersonated a cockroach, using a girlish voice: “Look what I can do! I can lay really flat!”

Watts abandoned the bug, and talked about his role on “The Late Late Show.” “I don’t really know much about what’s

going on. Except that I'm supposed to be coming up with a theme song," he said. "Hopefully, it's going to sound like 'Sanford and Son.' Or Mumford. One of the 'and son's.' His band will have five members. "I'm still looking for a female bass player. I don't want it to be just a bunch of fucking dudes. Badass is first, but I also want it to visually look diverse."

He went on, "I honestly have not seen an entire talk show, probably since '95. They all kind of bleed together. Plus, I don't have cable. I know a lot about fake talk shows." Since 2012, Watts has done his thing on the mock late-night show "Comedy Bang! Bang!" Corden, who is British, and is known for the BBC sitcom "Gavin & Stacey," as well as for starring in "One Man, Two Guvnors" on Broadway, has even less relevant experience. He told Stephen Colbert, of his upcoming program, which will be taped in Los Angeles, "It's going to be a complete disaster."

"I hope so," Watts said, dreamily. "I love terrible chaotic things. 'The Muppet Show' never went right!"

"So why did I decide to take this show?" he asked himself. "No. 1 was so I can possibly lose weight and get in shape"—his nutritionist is in L.A. "The second was I'll have extra time to pursue my own ideas, and thirdly was being on the show." He added, "If I were younger, I think I would've been a little more idealistic and, like, fuck TV and corporations. But, at the same time, people are people. Everything is made of people."

—*Emma Allen*

THE BOARDS SUPER



Let's review the gentrification of Brooklyn: ten years ago, the Gowanus Asteroid landed in Prospect Park, imbuing a group of passersby with awesome superpowers. This band of heroes, calling themselves the League of Victory, now spend their days putting out subway fires, stopping muggers, and generally keeping Brooklyn safe for

vegan bakeries and bicycle collectives.

That, anyway, is the version put forward by the new musical "Brooklynite," which recently opened Off Broadway. The show is the rare musical based on a store. ("Walmartopia," a Fringe Festival hit in 2006, is another.) Its inspiration is the Brooklyn Superhero Supply Company, which opened in Park Slope eleven years ago and specializes in capes, masks, ray guns, invisibility coating, and other crime-fighting accoutrements. Behind a secret moving wall—designed to elicit "whoa's"—is a spacious after-school student center run by 826NYC, part of Dave Eggers's tutoring and writing initiative. When the theatre producer Amanda Lipitz first saw the hidden-door reveal, she said recently, "It sang."

Lipitz and the producer Margo Lion brought the idea to the married novelists Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman, and hired Michael Mayer, the director of "Spring Awakening" and "Hedwig and the Angry Inch." The problem: "You can't write a show about a place," Mayer said the other day, visiting the store before a preview. Their first draft was about the tutoring program, until Waldman concluded that it was too "spinachy." ("No one wants to see a musical about tutors," Mayer said.) So they scrapped the idea and invented a Brooklyn inhabited by superheroes, including Captain Clear (invisibility), Kid Comet (speed), Astrolass (flight), and Avenging Angelo, endowed with a superhuman ability to find a parking space. Eventually, the team brought on the songwriter Peter Lerman, and Chabon and Waldman got sidetracked with other projects. In his staging, Mayer lifted elements of the shop, including utility belts, secret-identity glasses ("I'm a spectacles whore"), and immortality in a can.

"Where's antimatter?" he said, scanning the shelves.

"We might be out," Joshua Mandelbaum, 826NYC's executive director, said. Mayer had just demonstrated the Cape Tester, a platform rigged with fans that create a billowing effect, while reciting the official vow of heroism: "Ever vigilant, ever true." The shop has a black-and-white industrial look, but for his set Mayer favored a candy-colored palette, closer to the "Batman" and "Wonder Woman" TV series of his youth. He began snapping photos with his phone,

as two boys tried on X-ray glasses. "I like these big cans," he said, eying barrels labelled "Moon Base" and "Toxic Ooze." "We just need some bigger stuff stage left in our last scene." A couple popped in looking for paint samples, and an employee directed them to a hardware store down the street. Mandelbaum said that the store gets a lot of construction workers mistakenly looking for supplies. "They'll just walk in and give us a Sherwin-Williams number," he said.

Mayer bought two T-shirts and a "neutron device" and headed back to Manhattan. Later that afternoon, sixteen students from the after-school program, aged between nine and sixteen, attended a matinée of "Brooklynite," at the Vineyard Theatre. After the show, Mayer and Lerman sat onstage and answered their questions.

"How long did it take you to write?" Sarah, who lives in Bay Ridge and wore a butterfly headband, asked.

"Over three years," Mayer said.

"But not every day," Lerman added.

Chelsea (Bed-Stuy) asked about the audition process. Mayer said that some of the actors had worked with him before, on such projects as "American Idiot," a title that made the kids giggle. Adrian (Coney Island) asked, "Did you pick Kid Comet, like, instantly?"

Brianna (East New York) asked, "Who made your amazing but out-of-the-blue costumes?" Mayer called over the costume designer, Andrea Lauer. Brianna had a follow-up question: "What happens if the actors or actresses grow an inch or two?"

Katie (Park Slope) asked why there had been so many jokes about Park Slope.

"Well, yeah, because Park Slope is notoriously, like, the safe place—" Mayer said, struggling. "Do you live there? Have you ever been mugged?"

"I don't think a mugger would try to mug me," Katie said flatly.

"See? That's what we're talking about."

Adrian raised his hand again. "Why did you put in those parts where the people are in love?"

"The kissing parts?" Mayer said. "Well, we have to do some stuff for the adults, too." With that, the kids left to catch the subway back to Brooklyn.

—*Michael Schulman*

A man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit and tie, stands in a New York City street at dusk. He is holding a large white rectangular sign in front of him. The sign features the Winthrop logo (three stylized leaves above the word) and the text "WINTHROP" in a serif font, followed by "NYCyberKnife™" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background shows a blurred cityscape with buildings, a "HOTEL EMPIRE" sign, and a road with cars. The overall image has a warm, golden-hour glow.

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RICHER AND POORER

Accounting for inequality.

BY JILL LEPORE



For about a century, economic inequality has been measured on a scale, from zero to one, known as the Gini index and named after an Italian statistician, Corrado Gini, who devised it in 1912, when he was twenty-eight and the chair of statistics at the University of Cagliari. If all the income in the world were earned by one person and everyone else earned nothing, the world would have a Gini index of one. If everyone in the world earned exactly the same income, the world would have a Gini index of zero. The United States Census Bureau has been using Gini's measurement to calculate income inequality in America since 1947. Be-

tween 1947 and 1968, the U.S. Gini index dropped to .386, the lowest ever recorded. Then it began to climb.

Income inequality is greater in the United States than in any other democracy in the developed world. Between 1975 and 1985, when the Gini index for U.S. households rose from .397 to .419, as calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Gini indices of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Sweden, and Finland ranged roughly between .200 and .300, according to national data analyzed by Andrea Brandolini and Timothy Smeeding. But historical cross-country comparisons are difficult to make; the

Robert Putnam focusses on the widening gap between rich kids and poor kids.

data are patchy, and different countries measure differently. The Luxembourg Income Study, begun in 1983, harmonizes data collected from more than forty countries on six continents. According to the L.I.S.'s adjusted data, the United States has regularly had the highest Gini index of any affluent democracy. In 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau reported a Gini index of .476.

The evidence that income inequality in the United States has been growing for decades and is greater than in any other developed democracy is not much disputed. It is widely known and widely studied. Economic inequality has been an academic specialty at least since Gini first put chalk to chalkboard. In the nineteen-fifties, Simon Kuznets, who went on to win a Nobel Prize, used tax data to study the shares of income among groups, an approach that was further developed by the British economist Anthony Atkinson, beginning with his 1969 paper "On the Measurement of Inequality," in the *Journal of Economic Theory*. Last year's unexpected popular success of the English translation of Thomas Piketty's "Capital in the Twenty-first Century" drew the public's attention to measurements of inequality, but Piketty's work had long since reached American social scientists, especially through a 2003 paper that he published with the Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez, in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Believing that the Gini index underestimates inequality, Piketty and Saez favor Kuznets's approach. (Atkinson, Piketty, Saez, and Facundo Alvaredo are also the creators of the World Top Incomes Database, which collects income-share data from more than twenty countries.) In "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913-1998," Piketty and Saez used tax data to calculate what percentage of income goes to the top one per cent and to the top ten per cent. In 1928, the top one per cent earned twenty-four per cent of all income; in 1944, they earned eleven per cent, a rate that began to rise in the nineteen-eighties. By 2012, according to Saez's updated data, the top one per cent were earning twenty-three per cent of the nation's income, almost the same ratio as in 1928, although it has since dropped slightly.

Political scientists are nearly as likely

to study economic inequality as economists are, though they're less interested in how much inequality a market can bear than in how much a democracy can bear, and here the general thinking is that the United States is nearing its breaking point. In 2001, the American Political Science Association formed a Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy; a few years later, it concluded that growing economic inequality was threatening fundamental American political institutions. In 2009, Oxford University Press published both a seven-hundred-page "Handbook of Economic Inequality" and a collection of essays about the political consequences of economic inequality whose argument is its title: "The Unsustainable American State." There's a global version of this argument, too. "Inequality Matters," a 2013 report by the United Nations, took the view—advanced by the economist Joseph Stiglitz in his book "The Price of Inequality"—that growing income inequality is responsible for all manner of political instability, as well as for the slowing of economic growth worldwide. Last year, when the Pew Research Center conducted a survey about which of five dangers people in forty-four countries consider to be the "greatest threat to the world," many of the countries polled put religious and ethnic hatred at the top of their lists, but Americans and many Europeans chose inequality.

What's new about the chasm between the rich and the poor in the United States, then, isn't that it's growing or that scholars are studying it or that people are worried about it. What's new is that American politicians of all spots and stripes are talking about it, if feebly: inequality this, inequality that. In January, at a forum sponsored by Freedom Partners (a free-market advocacy group with ties to the Koch brothers), the G.O.P. Presidential swains Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, and Marco Rubio battled over which of them disliked inequality more, agreeing only that its existence wasn't their fault. "The top one per cent earn a higher share of our income, nationally, than any year since 1928," Cruz said, drawing on the work of Saez and Piketty. Cruz went on, "I chuckle every time I hear Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton talk about

income inequality, because it's increased dramatically under their policies." No doubt there has been a lot of talk. "Let's close the loopholes that lead to inequality by allowing the top one per cent to avoid paying taxes on their accumulated wealth," Obama said during his State of the Union address. Speaker of the House John Boehner countered that "the President's policies have made income inequality worse."

The reason Democrats and Republicans are fighting over who's to blame for growing economic inequality is that, aside from a certain amount of squabbling, it's no longer possible to deny that it exists—a development that's not to be sneezed at, given the state of the debate on climate change. That's not to say the agreement runs deep; in fact, it couldn't be shallower. The causes of income inequality are much disputed; so are its costs. And knowing the numbers doesn't appear to be changing anyone's mind about what, if anything, should be done about it.

Robert Putnam's new book, "Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis" (Simon & Schuster), is an attempt to set the statistics aside and, instead, tell a story. "Our Kids" begins with the story of the town where Putnam grew up, Port Clinton, Ohio. Putnam is a political scientist, but his argument is historical—it's about change over time—and fuelled, in part, by nostalgia. "My hometown was, in the 1950s, a passable embodiment of the American Dream," he writes, "a place that offered decent opportunity for all the kids in town, whatever their background." Sixty years later, Putnam says, Port Clinton "is a split-screen American nightmare, a community in which kids from the wrong side of the tracks that bisect the town can barely imagine the future that awaits the kids from the right side of the tracks."

Inequality-wise, Port Clinton makes a reasonable Middletown. According to the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, Port Clinton's congressional district, Ohio's ninth, has a Gini index of .467, which is somewhat lower than the A.C.S.'s estimate of the national average. But "Our Kids" isn't a book about the Gini index. "Some of us learn from

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numbers, but more of us learn from stories,” according to an appendix that Putnam co-wrote with Jennifer M. Silva. Putnam, the author of “Bowling Alone,” is the director of the Saguaro Seminar for civic engagement at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government; Silva, a sociologist, has been a postdoctoral fellow there. In her 2013 book “Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty” (Oxford), Silva reported the results of interviews she conducted with a hundred working-class adults in Lowell, Massachusetts and Richmond, Virginia, described her account of the structural inequalities that shape their lives as “a story of institutions—not individuals or their families,” and argued that those inequalities are the consequence of the past half century’s “massive effort to roll back social protections from the market.” For “Our Kids,” Silva visited Robert Putnam’s home town and interviewed young people and their parents. Putnam graduated from Port Clinton High School in 1959. The surviving members of his class are now in their mid-seventies. Putnam and Silva sent them questionnaires; seventy-five people returned them. Silva also spent two years interviewing more than a hundred young adults in nine other cities and counties across the nation. As Putnam and Silva note, Silva conducted nearly all of the interviews Putnam uses in his book.

“Our Kids” is a heartfelt portrait of four generations: Putnam’s fellow 1959 graduates and their children, and the kids in Port Clinton and those nine other communities today and their parents. The book tells more or less the same story that the numbers tell; it’s just got people in it. Specifically, it’s got kids: the kids Putnam used to know, and, above all, the kids Silva interviewed. The book proceeds from the depressing assumption that presenting the harrowing lives of poor young people is the best way to get Americans to care about poverty.

Putnam has changed the names of all his subjects and removed certain identifying details. He writes about them as characters. First, there’s Don. He went to Port Clinton High School with Putnam. His father worked two jobs: an eight-hour shift at Port Clinton Man-

ufacturing followed by seven and a half hours at a local canning plant. A minister in town helped Don apply to university. “I didn’t know I was poor until I went to college,” Don says. He graduated from college, became a minister, and married a high-school teacher; they had one child, who became a high-school librarian. Libby, another member of Putnam’s graduating class, was the sixth of ten children. Like Don’s parents, neither of Libby’s parents finished high school. Her father worked at Standard Products, a factory on Maple Street that made many different things out of rubber, from weather stripping to tank treads. Libby won a scholarship to the University of Toledo, but dropped out to get married and have kids. Twenty years later, after a divorce, she got a job as a clerk in a lumberyard, worked her way up to becoming a writer for a local newspaper, and eventually ran for countywide office and won.

All but two of the members of Putnam’s graduating class were white. Putnam’s wistfulness toward his childhood home town is at times painful to read. The whiteness of Port Clinton in the nineteen-fifties was not mere happenstance but the consequence of discriminatory housing and employment practices. I glanced through the records of the Ohio chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., which included a branch in Port Clinton. The Ohio chapter’s report for 1957

Negro families moved into formerly ‘all-white neighborhoods.’” Thurgood Marshall, the director of the N.A.A.C.P.’s Legal Defense and Educational Fund, spoke in Ohio in 1958, after which a sympathetic Cleveland newspaper wrote that Marshall “will never be named to the Supreme Court.” In 1960, the Ohio N.A.A.C.P. launched a statewide voter-registration drive. One pamphlet asked, “Are you permitted to live wherever you please in any Ohio City?” Putnam acknowledges that there was a lot of racism in Port Clinton, but he suggests that, whatever hardships the two black kids in his class faced because they were black, the American dream was nevertheless theirs. This fails to convince. As one of those two kids, now grown, tells Putnam, “Your then was not my then, and your now isn’t even my now.”

In any case, the world changed, and Port Clinton changed with it. “Most of the downtown shops of my youth stand empty and derelict,” Putnam writes. In the late nineteen-sixties, the heyday of the Great Society, when income inequality in the United States was as low as it has ever been, the same was probably true of Port Clinton. But in the nineteen-seventies the town’s manufacturing base collapsed. Standard Products laid off more than half of its workers. In 1993, the plant closed. Since then, unemployment has continued to rise and wages to fall. Between 1999 and 2013, the percentage of children in Port Clinton living in poverty rose from ten to forty.

Silva found David hanging out in a park. His father, currently in prison, never had a steady job. David’s parents separated when he was a little boy. He bounced around, attending seven elementary schools. When he was thirteen, he was arrested for robbery. He graduated from high school only because he was given course credit for hours he’d worked at Big Boppers Diner (from which he was fired after graduation). In 2012, when David was eighteen, he got his girlfriend pregnant. “I’ll never get ahead,” he posted on his Facebook page last year, after his girlfriend left him. “I’m FUCKING DONE.”

Wealthy newcomers began arriving in the nineteen-nineties. On the shores of Lake Erie, just a few miles past Port Clinton’s trailer parks, they built



chronicles, among other things, its failed attempt to gain passage of statewide Fair Housing legislation; describes how “cross burnings occurred in many cities in Ohio”; recounts instances of police brutality, including in Columbus, where a patrolman beat a woman “with the butt of his pistol all over her face and body”; and states that in Toledo, Columbus, “and in a number of other communities, the Association intervened in situations where violence flared up or was threatened when

mansions and golf courses and gated communities. "Chelsea and her family live in a large white home with a wide porch overlooking the lake," Putnam writes, introducing another of his younger characters. Chelsea was the president of her high school's student body and editor of the yearbook. Her mother, Wendy, works part time; her father, Dick, is a businessman. In the basement of their house, Wendy and Dick had a "1950s-style diner" built so that Chelsea and her brother would have a place to hang out with their friends. When Chelsea's brother got a bad grade in school, Wendy went all the way to the school board to get it changed. Chelsea and her brother are now in college. Wendy does not appear to believe in welfare. "You have to work if you want to get rich," she says. "If my kids are going to be successful, I don't think they should have to pay other people who are sitting around doing nothing for their success."

Aside from the anecdotes, the bulk of "Our Kids" is an omnibus of social-science scholarship. The book's chief and authoritative contribution is its careful presentation for a popular audience of important work on the erosion, in the past half century, of so many forms of social, economic, and political support for families, schools, and communities—with consequences that amount to what Silva and others have called the "privatization of risk." The social-science literature includes a complicated debate about the relationship between inequality of outcome (differences of income and of wealth) and inequality of opportunity (differences in education and employment). To most readers, these issues are more familiar as a political disagreement. In American politics, Democrats are more likely to talk about both kinds of inequality, while Republicans tend to confine their concern to inequality of opportunity. According to Putnam, "All sides in this debate agree on one thing, however: as income inequality expands, kids from more privileged backgrounds start and probably finish further and further ahead of their less privileged peers, even if the rate of socioeconomic mobility is unchanged." He also takes the position, again relying on a considerable body of scholarship, that, "quite apart from the danger that the opportunity gap poses to



American prosperity, it also undermines our democracy." Chelsea is interested in politics. David has never voted.

The American dream is in crisis, Putnam argues, because Americans used to care about other people's kids and now they only care about their own kids. But, he writes, "America's poor kids do belong to us and we to them. They are our kids." This is a lot like his argument in "Bowling Alone." In high school in Port Clinton, Putnam was in a bowling league; he regards bowling leagues as a marker of community and civic engagement; bowling leagues are in decline; hence, Americans don't take care of one another anymore. "Bowling Alone" and "Our Kids" also have the same homey just-folksiness. And they have the same shortcomings. If you don't miss bowling leagues or all-white suburbs where women wear aprons—if Putnam's then was not your then and his now isn't your now—his well-intentioned "we" can be remarkably grating.

In story form, the argument of "Our

Kids" is that while Wendy and Dick were building a fifties-style diner for their kids in the basement of their lake-front mansion, grade-grubbing with their son's teachers, and glue-gunning the decorations for their daughter's prom, every decent place to hang out in Port Clinton closed its doors, David was fired from his job at Big Boppers, and he got his girlfriend pregnant because, by the time David and Chelsea were born, in the nineteen-nineties, not only was Standard Products out of business but gone, too, was the sense of civic obligation and commonweal—everyone caring about everyone else's kids—that had made it possible for Don and Libby to climb out of poverty in the nineteen-fifties and the nineteen-sixties. "Nobody gave a shit," David says. And he's not wrong.

"Our Kids" is a passionate, urgent book. It also has a sad helplessness. Putnam tells a story teeming with characters and full of misery but without a single villain. This

is deliberate. "This is a book without upper-class villains," he insists in the book's final chapter. In January, Putnam tweeted, "My new book 'Our Kids' shows a growing gap between rich kids and poor kids. We'll work with all sides on solutions." It's easier to work with all sides if no side is to blame. But Putnam's eagerness to influence Congress has narrative consequences. If you're going to tell a story about bad things happening to good people, you've got to offer an explanation, and, when you make your arguments through characters, your reader will expect that explanation in the form of characters. I feel bad for Chelsea. But I feel worse for David. Am I supposed to hate Wendy?

Some people make arguments by telling stories; other people make arguments by counting things. Charles Dickens was a story man. In "Hard Times" (1854), a novel written when statistics was on the rise, Dickens's villain, Thomas Gradgrind, was a numbers man, "a man of facts and calculations," who named one of his sons Adam Smith and another Malthus. "With a rule and a pair of scales, and

the multiplication table always in his pocket, Sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to."

Numbers men are remote and cold of heart, Dickens thought. But, of course, the appeal of numbers lies in their remoteness and coldness. Numbers depersonalize; that remains one of their chief claims to authority, and to a different explanatory force than can be found in, say, a poem. "Quantification is a technology of distance," as the historian of science Theodore Porter has pointed out. "Reliance on numbers and quantitative manipulation minimizes the need for intimate knowledge and personal trust." It's difficult to understand something like income inequality across large populations and to communicate your understanding of it across vast distances without counting. But quantification's lack of intimacy is also its weakness; it represents not only a gain but also a loss of knowledge.

Corrado Gini, he of the Gini index, was a numbers man, at a time when statistics had become a modern sci-

ence. In 1925, four years after Gini wrote "Measurement of Inequality of Incomes," he signed the "Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals" (he was the only statistician to do so) and was soon running the Presidential Commission for the Study of Constitutional Reforms. As Jean-Guy Prévost reported in "A Total Science: Statistics in Liberal and Fascist Italy" (2009), Gini's work was so closely tied to the Fascist state that, in 1944, after the regime fell, he was tried for being an apologist for Fascism. In the shadow of his trial, he joined the Movimento Unionista Italiano, a political party whose objective was to annex Italy to the United States. "This would solve all of Italy's problems," the movement's founder, Santi Paladino, told a reporter for *Time*. ("Paladino has never visited the U.S., though his wife Francesca lived 24 years in The Bronx," the magazine noted.) But, for Gini, the movement's purpose was to provide him with some anti-Fascist credentials.

The story of Gini is a good illustration of the problem with stories, which is that they personalize (which is also their power). His support for Fascism doesn't mean that the Gini index isn't valuable. It is valuable. The life of Corrado Gini can't be used to undermine all of statistical science. Still, if you wanted to write an indictment of statistics as an instrument of authoritarian states, and if you had a great deal of other evidence to support that indictment—including other stories and, ideally, numbers—why yes, Gini would be an excellent character to introduce in Chapter 1.

Because stories contain one kind of truth and numbers another, many writers mix and match, telling representative stories and backing them up with aggregate data. Putnam, though, doesn't so much mix and match as split the difference. He tells stories about kids but presents data about the economy. That's why "Our Kids" has heaps of victims but not a single villain. "We encounter Elijah in a dingy shopping mall on the north side of Atlanta, during his lunch break from a job packing groceries," Putnam writes. "Elijah is thin and small in stature, perhaps five foot seven, and wears baggy clothes that bulk his frame: jeans belted low



"Next time, do your thinking out loud to yourself."

around his upper thighs, a pair of Jordans on his feet." As for why Elijah is packing groceries, the book offers not characters—there are no interviews, for instance, with members of the Georgia legislature or the heads of national corporations whose businesses have left Atlanta—but numbers, citing statistics about the city ("Large swaths of southern and western Atlanta itself are over 95 percent black, with child poverty rates ranging from 50 percent to 80 percent") and providing a series of charts reporting the results of studies about things like class differences in parenting styles and in the frequency of the family dinner.

In "The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power" (Little, Brown), Steve Fraser fumes that what's gone wrong with political discourse in America is that the left isn't willing to blame anyone for anything anymore. There used to be battle cries. No more kings! Down with fat cats! Damn the moneymen! Like Putnam's argument, Fraser's is both historical and nostalgic. Fraser longs for the passion and force with which Americans of earlier generations attacked aggregated power. Think of the way Frederick Douglass wrote about slavery, Ida B. Wells wrote about lynching, Ida Tarbell wrote about Standard Oil, Upton Sinclair wrote about the meatpacking industry, and Louis Brandeis wrote about the money trust. These people weren't squeamish about villains.

To chronicle the rise of acquiescence, Fraser examines two differences between the long nineteenth century and today. "The first Gilded Age, despite its glaring inequities, was accompanied by a gradual rise in the standard of living; the second by a gradual erosion," he writes. In the first Gilded Age, everyone from reporters to politicians apparently felt comfortable painting plutocrats as villains; in the second, this is, somehow, forbidden. "If the first Gilded Age was full of sound and fury," he writes, "the second seemed to take place in a padded cell." Fraser argues that while Progressive Era muckrakers ended the first Gilded Age by drawing on an age-old tradition of dissent to criticize prevailing economic, social, and polit-

ical arrangements, today's left doesn't engage in dissent; it engages in consent, urging solutions that align with neoliberalism, technological determinism, and global capitalism: "Environmental despoiling arouses righteous eating; cultural decay inspires charter schools; rebellion against work becomes work as a form of rebellion; old-form anticlericalism morphs into the piety of the secular; the break with convention ends up as the politics of style; the cri de coeur against alienation surrenders to the triumph of the solitary; the marriage of political and cultural radicalism ends in divorce." Why not blame the financial industry? Why not blame the Congress that deregulated it? Why not blame the system itself? Because, Fraser argues, the left has been cowed into silence on the main subject at hand: "What we could not do, what was not even speakable, was to tamper with the basic institutions of financial capitalism."

Putnam closes "Our Kids" with a chapter called "What Is to Be Done?" Tampering with the basic institutions of financial capitalism is not on his to-do list. The chapter includes one table, one chart, many stories, and this statement: "The absence of personal villains in our stories does not mean that no one is at fault." At fault are "social policies that reflect collective decisions," and, "insofar as we have some responsibility for those collective decisions, we are implicated by our failure to address removable barriers to others' success." What can Putnam's "we" do? He proposes changes in four realms: family structure, parenting, school, and community. His policy recommendations include expanding the earned-income tax credit and protecting existing anti-poverty programs; implementing more generous parental leaves, better child-care programs, and state-funded preschool; equalizing the funding of public schools, providing more community-based neighborhood schools, and increasing support for vocational high-school programs and for community colleges; ending pay-to-play extracurricular activities in public schools and developing mentorship programs that tie schools to communities and community organizations.

All of these ideas are admirable,

ON THE TOWN

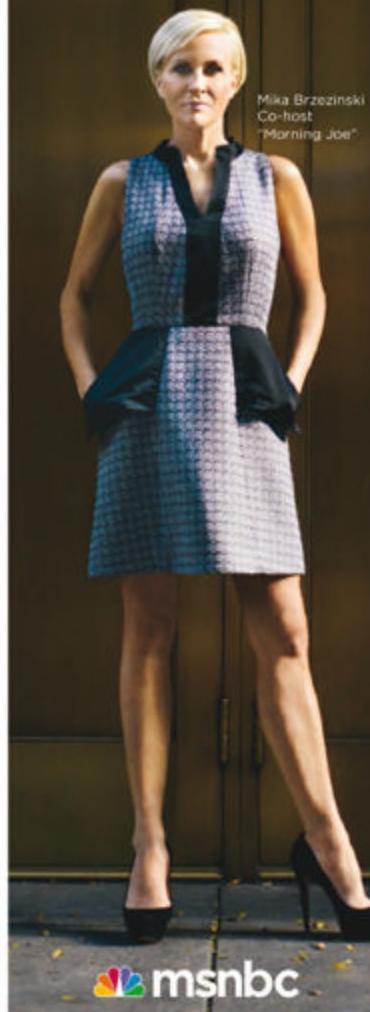
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many are excellent, none are new, and, at least at the federal level, few are achievable. The American political imagination has become as narrow as the gap between rich and poor is wide.

Inquality: What Can Be Done?,” by Anthony Atkinson, will be published this spring (Harvard). Atkinson is a renowned expert on the measurement of economic inequality, but in “Inequality” he hides his math. “There are a number of graphs, and a small number of tables,” he writes, by way of apology, and he paraphrases Stephen Hawking: “Every equation halves the number of readers.”

Much of the book is a discussion of specific proposals. Atkinson believes that solutions like Putnam’s, which focus on inequality of opportunity, mainly through reforms having to do with public education, are inadequate. Atkinson thinks that the division between inequality of outcome and inequality of opportunity is largely false. He believes that tackling inequality of outcome is a very good way to tackle inequality of opportunity. (If you help a grownup get a job, her kids will have a better chance of climbing out of poverty, too.) Above all, he disagrees with the widespread assumption that technological progress and globalization are responsible for growing inequality. That assumption, he argues, is wrong and also dangerous, because it encourages the belief that growing inequality is inevitable.

Atkinson points out that neither globalization nor rapid technological advance is new and there are, therefore, lessons to be learned from history. Those lessons do not involve nostalgia. (Atkinson is actually an optimistic sort, and he spends time appreciating rising standards of living, worldwide.) One of those lessons is that globalizing economies aren’t like hurricanes or other acts of God or nature. Instead, they’re governed by laws regulating things like unions and trusts and banks and wages and taxes; laws are passed by legislators; in democracies, legislators are elected. So, too, new technologies don’t simply fall out of the sky, like meteors or little miracles. “The direction of technological change

is the product of decisions by firms, researchers, and governments,” Atkinson writes. The iPhone exists, as Mariana Mazzucato demonstrated in her 2013 book “The Entrepreneurial State,” because various branches of the U.S. government provided research assistance that resulted in several key technological developments, including G.P.S., multi-touch screens, L.C.D. displays, lithium-ion batteries, and cellular networks.

Atkinson isn’t interested in stories the way Putnam is interested in stories. And he isn’t interested in villains the way Fraser is interested in villains. But he is interested in responsible parties, and in demanding government action. “It is not enough to say that rising inequality is due to technological forces outside our control,” Atkinson writes. “The government can influence the path taken.” In “Inequality: What Can Be Done?,” he offers fifteen proposals, from the familiar (unemployment programs, national savings bonds, and a more progressive tax structure) to the novel (a governmental role in the direction of technological development, a capital endowment or “minimum inheritance” paid to everyone on reaching adulthood), along with five “ideas to pursue,” which is where things get Piketty (a global tax on wealth, a minimum tax on corporations).

In Port Clinton, Ohio, a barbed-wire fence surrounds the abandoned Standard Products factory; the E.P.A. has posted signs warning that the site is hazardous. There’s no work there anymore, only poison. Robert Putnam finds that heartbreaking. Steve Fraser wishes people were angrier about it. Anthony Atkinson thinks something can be done. Atkinson’s specific policy recommendations are for the United Kingdom. In the United States, most of his proposals are nonstarters, no matter how many times you hear the word “inequality” on “Meet the Press” this year.

It might be that people have been studying inequality in all the wrong places. A few years ago, two scholars of comparative politics, Alfred Stepan, at Columbia, and the late Juan J. Linz—numbers men—tried to figure out why the United States has for so long had much greater income inequality than

any other developed democracy. Because this disparity has been more or less constant, the question doesn’t lend itself very well to historical analysis. Nor is it easily subject to the distortions of nostalgia. But it does lend itself very well to comparative analysis.

Stepan and Linz identified twenty-three long-standing democracies with advanced economies. Then they counted the number of veto players in each of those twenty-three governments. (A veto player is a person or body that can block a policy decision. Stepan and Linz explain, “For example, in the United States, the Senate and the House of Representatives are veto players because without their consent, no bill can become a law.”) More than half of the twenty-three countries Stepan and Linz studied have only one veto player; most of these countries have unicameral parliaments. A few countries have two veto players; Switzerland and Australia have three. Only the United States has four. Then they made a chart, comparing Gini indices with veto-player numbers: the more veto players in a government, the greater the nation’s economic inequality. This is only a correlation, of course, and cross-country economic comparisons are fraught, but it’s interesting.

Then they observed something more. Their twenty-three democracies included eight federal governments with both upper and lower legislative bodies. Using the number of seats and the size of the population to calculate malapportionment, they assigned a “Gini Index of Inequality of Representation” to those eight upper houses, and found that the United States had the highest score: it has the most malapportioned and the least representative upper house. These scores, too, correlated with the countries’ Gini scores for income inequality: the less representative the upper body of a national legislature, the greater the gap between the rich and the poor.

The growth of inequality isn’t inevitable. But, insofar as Americans have been unable to adopt measures to reduce it, the numbers might seem to suggest that the problem doesn’t lie with how Americans treat one another’s kids, as lousy as that is. It lies with Congress. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

OF YOUNGER DAYS

BY IAN FRAZIER



When I was sixty-three, a cheeseburger at a diner on Fifty-seventh Street cost \$24.95, you could ride the Staten Island Ferry for free, and a kid could get a pretty decent college education for a quarter of a million dollars. Life was slower then, partly because of my newly acquired hip problem, but I did not know enough to appreciate the leisurely pace. I was always wanting to hurry up, to go faster and farther, to cross the street before the "Walk" signal ended. Now I wonder—why in the world was I in such a rush, back when I was sixty-three? Obviously, I did not want to get hit by a car, and there never seemed to be enough time to get across all twelve lanes of Queens Boulevard, the "Boulevard of Death." But now I often have trouble remembering what else seemed so almighty urgent to me back then.

During that never-to-be-repeated summer, I had just turned sixty-three when I began the hesitant, sweet, shy courtship of my first real girlfriend. My wife was furious, of course. It's poignant to think that today I've even forgotten her name—and my girlfriend's, too. The summer I was sixty-three was also when I had my second real girl-

friend, and my fifth, and my eleventh. Looking back, and remembering how much I paid them, I wonder if they weren't prostitutes. But what did I know? I was just your typical gawky, self-conscious sixty-three-year-old, hormones going crazy. My voice had recently changed, from a high, piping tenor to a kind of guttural, gurgling rasp. My body was changing, too, and I became very aware of and embarrassed by the large breasts I had developed. So much seemed new and unfamiliar when I was sixty-three.

That enchanted summer was all about the music. I gave myself over entirely to the many songs I heard everywhere—in elevators, on SiriusXM, in shopping malls, in my periodontist's office—as they created a powerful soundtrack for my days and nights. Even today, when I hear a certain lyric from that lost summer of however many months ago, and Katy Perry sings that she's "comin' at you like a [something?] horse," bittersweet tears fill my eyes. How could anything so lovely be so fleeting? The radiance has fled, but to where? Looking back, I regret that I did not go to more concerts, choosing instead just to hum the tunes while Dr. Tonnelli packed cotton under my

lip before the gum augmentation. And where did those concerts take place, anyway, and what were the names of the people or the bands (if they were bands) I listened to? Now I'll never know unless I look them up.

The summer I was sixty-three was also when I went to San Francisco. One morning, I just dropped everything, said goodbye to everybody I could get in touch with, and flew out there in a middle seat in economy. San Francisco was different then, in the early sixties—my early sixties, that is. I look at the wild haircut I had back then and I have to laugh! And where in the world did I get those pants? Yes, I am still wearing them right now, but where did I get them? At the Short Hills Mall, I think. In San Francisco, I did a lot of experimenting with drugs, mainly because I had problems getting my prescription for blood-pressure medication renewed on a weekend. I may have permanently messed up my DNA, but it was worth it. You take all kinds of risks when you're younger, and sixty-three. You think you're immortal.

If some genie granted me the power to reverse time and meet up with my naïve sixty-three-year-old self, what advice would I give him? I might say, "Sixty-three-year-old, hang on tightly to experience while it's in your grasp, especially the sales slips. And don't be afraid to try new outfits, which are what you'll later need the sales slips for. Dump your oil stocks, because the price of oil is going to come down. But, mainly, younger self—*live!* The mysterious, glorious, ineffable sweetness of being sixty-three will come to you only once on this earth."

But then my sixty-three-year-old self would say back to me, "Yes, yes, I know. But tell me more about the price of oil. Will it go below fifty dollars a barrel? And what horse should I bet in the Belmont? And what odds should I give?"

That would probably hurt my feelings, because I'm imparting hard-won, sixty-four-year-old life advice here. So I would then knee my sixty-three-year-old self in the groin, and, when he (I) bent over, give him (me) an uppercut with both fists. Then he (I) would really understand what it means to be sixty-three. ♦

IN THE MEMORY WARD

The Warburg is Britain's most eccentric and original library. Can it survive?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

At first, the library of the Warburg Institute, in London, seems and smells like any other university library: four floors of fluorescent lights and steel shelves, with the damp, weedy aroma of aging books everywhere, and sudden apparitions of graduate students wearing that look, at once brightly keen and infinitely discouraged, eternally shared by

signs pointing toward "Magic Mirrors" and "Amulets" and "The Evil Eye." Long shelves of original medieval astrology hug texts on modern astronomy. The section on "Modern Philosophy" includes volume after volume of Nietzsche and half a shelf of Hume. The open stacks—exceptional in any gathering of irreplaceable books—are, in the European scheme

plete with glaring owl, of E. H. Gombrich, perhaps the most important of modern art historians, who directed the Warburg Institute in its high period, in the nineteen-sixties. Beside each elevator bank, a chart displaying, in capital letters, the library's curious organization helps guide the bewildered student: "FIRST FLOOR: IMAGE," "SECOND FLOOR: WORD," up to "FOURTH FLOOR: ACTION-ORIENTATION," with "ACTION" comprising "Cultural and Political History," and "ORIENTATION" "Magic and Science." Mounted in the stairwells are uncanny black-and-white photographic collages of a single female type—a woman dancing in flowing drapery—that is seen in many forms, from classical friezes to Renaissance painting.



Aby Warburg (second from left) was the spirit behind the iconographic studies that dominated much of twentieth-century art history.

graduate students, whether the old kind, with suède elbow patches, or the new kind, with many piercings.

Only as the visitor begins to study the collections does the oddity of the place appear. In the range-finder plates mounted on the shelves, where in a normal library one would expect to see "Spanish Literature, Sixteenth Century" or "Biography, American: E663-664," there are, instead,

of things, almost unknown. In the Bibliothèque Nationale, in Paris, the aim seems to be to keep as many books as possible safely out of the hands of people who might want to read them. In the Warburg Library, the books are available to be thumbed through at will.

History is here, ancient and local. An old edition of Epictetus, opened, turns out to bear the bookplate, com-

It is a library like no other in Europe—in its cross-disciplinary reference, its peculiarities, its originality, its strange depths and unexpected shallows. Magic and science, evil eyes and saints' lives: these things repose side by side in a labyrinth of imagery and icons and memory. Dan Brown's hero Robert Langdon supposedly teaches "symbology" at Harvard. There is no such field, but if there were, and if Professor

Langdon wanted to study it before making love to mysterious Frenchwomen and nimbly avoiding Opus Dei hit men, this is where he would come to study.

Begun at the start of the last century, in Hamburg, by Aby Warburg, a wealthy banker's son, the Warburg Library has been often expanded, but the original vision has never really been altered. It is a vast and expensive institution, devoted to a system of ideas that, however fascinating, are also in some dated ways faddish, and in some small ways foolish. Warburg, who died in 1929, spent part of his adult life in and out of mental hospitals—at one point, he lived in fear that he was being daily served human flesh. Yet he was the spirit behind the "iconographic studies" that dominated art history for most of the second half of the twentieth century—the man who reoriented the scholarly study of art from a discipline devoted essentially to saying who had painted what pictures when to one asking what all the little weird bits and pieces within the pictures might have meant in their time.

In the past several years, the Warburg's future has been fiercely contested. It is in some senses a small and parochial struggle, right out of Trollope's Barchester novels, and in others about something very big—about the future of private visions within public institutions, about what memory is and what we owe it, about how to tell when an original vision has become merely an eccentric one. It is the tale that has been told, in another key, about moving the Barnes Foundation from Merion to Philadelphia, and about expanding the Frick Collection, in New York. The question is what we owe the past's past, what we owe the institutions that have shaped our view of how history happened, when contemporary history is happening to them.

The fight over the future of the Warburg Institute came to a climax in the past few months, but it started seven years ago, when the Warburg Institute and then the University of London began to seek legal counsel in order to clarify the terms of the trust deed that, in 1944, as the Second World War raged, had brought the institute into the university. Last year, the university initiated a law-suit, thinking to "converge" the Warburg's books into its larger library system, and

to continue charging the Warburg a very large fee for the use of its building. Warburg-shaped scholars sought to rally the academic community in the pages of journals and on humanities Listservs. "If the university's plans succeed," the Princeton historian Anthony Grafton and the Harvard art historian Jeffrey Hamburger wrote, in *The New York Review of Books*, "the institute will have to abandon Warburg's fundamental principles, lose control of its own books and periodicals (many of them acquired by gift or by the expenditure of the institute's endowments), and shed, over time, the distinguished staff of scholars and scholar-librarians who train its students and continue to shape its holdings....A center of European culture and a repository of the Western tradition that escaped Hitler and survived the Blitz may finally be destroyed by British bean counters."

After smoldering within academia, the affair was ignited in public by a petition launched by an American Ph.D. student at University College London named Brooke Palmieri, a Warburg visitor who had come to London first to work in the rare-book trade, then to write a thesis on the pre-Pennsylvania Quakers. "I started the petition on Change.org last July," she said recently, in that special lilting drawl of East Coast Americans long resident in London. "And within a couple of months it was just shy of twenty-five thousand signatures. It was an astonishing number for a library. But the Warburg has an amazingly vibrant intellectual history. I think what's probably most interesting to me is that it runs on what they call 'the law of the good neighbor'—it's not based on what librarians alphabetically catalogue. Instead, it's catalogued according to themes. The methodology of serendipity is what it's all about, and the methodology of serendipity is responsible for most great ideas."

Visiting London last fall, I found that while many people were exercised about the future of the Warburg, and had much to say about the approaching judgment, what they offered was more complicated than a simple picture of philistine university administrators assaulting virtuous scholars. Some people had their mouths firmly shut: those within the institute by the pending decision; the historian Lisa Jardine, who is Palmieri's



ANA JUAN, FEBRUARY 10, 2010

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thesis adviser, and who had at first been publicly passionate in protest, by the sudden possibility that she might, in an emergency, be called on to run the Warburg if it lost the case and had to rebuild.

Others could speak more freely. Over dinner with Charles Saumarez Smith, the chief executive of the Royal Academy of Arts, formerly the director of the National Gallery, and a Warburg Institute alumnus, certain things became clearer. The story of the library and its migration to London, at least, seemed simple enough: at the end of the nineteenth century, Aby Warburg, a scion of the Hamburg Jewish banking family, had fallen in love with Italy, and with the idea of the Florentine Renaissance as the great, gone, golden time. In formation he was more German than Jewish, having fled family Orthodoxy as a boy, and he had begun to construct a library devoted to the Italian Renaissance and then, more broadly, to the way that the classical past had migrated into Renaissance humanism and beyond, into European culture. (At the precocious age of thirteen, Aby made a deal with his brother Max: he would surrender his interest in the firm if Max would pay for all the books he wanted to buy.)

With the onset of Nazism, enemy to learning and to Jewish bankers both, the library, still staffed by Warburg's disciples, looked elsewhere for a home. In 1933, it found one in London, where, after much last-minute maneuvering, the books, documents, furniture, and staff, including Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, who had been Warburg's most important collaborators, were all sent, finding space temporarily in Millbank and then, for twenty years, in South Kensington. Toward the end of the desperate war, the Warburg family, in a succinct document, deeded the collection permanently to the University of London, on condition that it be housed in a "suitable building in close proximity to the University" and kept intact.

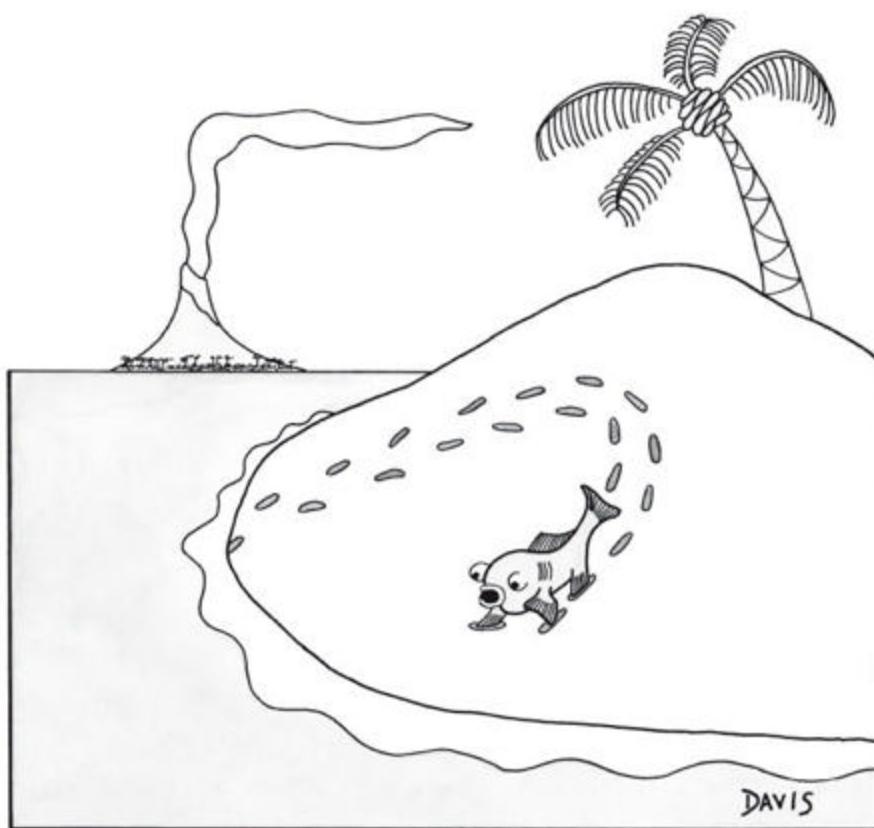
Saumarez Smith tried to explain how the Warburg's approach was different from the connoisseurship-based practice of conventional British art history. "It was the idea that art stood, and stands, for something more important and more fundamental than just the work of artists on their own," he said. "This was the atmosphere of the Warburg Institute when it was in South Kensington. It was a cell of chain-smoking German scholars who stood entirely apart

from the English academic establishment."

Then, in 1958, Saumarez Smith noted, the Warburg was institutionalized in a grand building in Woburn Square. In some measure, it was victimized by its own influence. "When I was a postgraduate student, the Warburg still had, and it probably still has, considerable intellectual clout," he observed, "but, as the rest of the scholarly world became more interdisciplinary and more Warburgian, the Warburg itself turned into a center for narrower Renaissance scholarship, believing in professional academic expertise and profoundly suspicious of newer scholarship."

Even paranoids have enemies, as the saying goes, and even philistine university bureaucrats, it seems, do sometimes become reasonably exasperated by overprivileged and insulated academics. The word on the Barchester Street, so to speak, was that the reality of what was going on was more complicated than its representation in the popular press. The "convergence" policy that the university was said to be forcing on the Warburg had, at its heart, the unavoidable logic of modernization. (The university was, of course, also being squeezed by budget cuts from the British government.) "The Warburg now faces a crisis," Saumarez Smith went on, "because it has assumed that it can carry on regardless, ignoring what has been happening over the past twenty years in university administration—the creation of the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, the systematization of library catalogues, which the Warburg has vigorously resisted, the need to engage in fund-raising, which the Warburg has not done, the need to engage with the outside world as a center of scholarship."

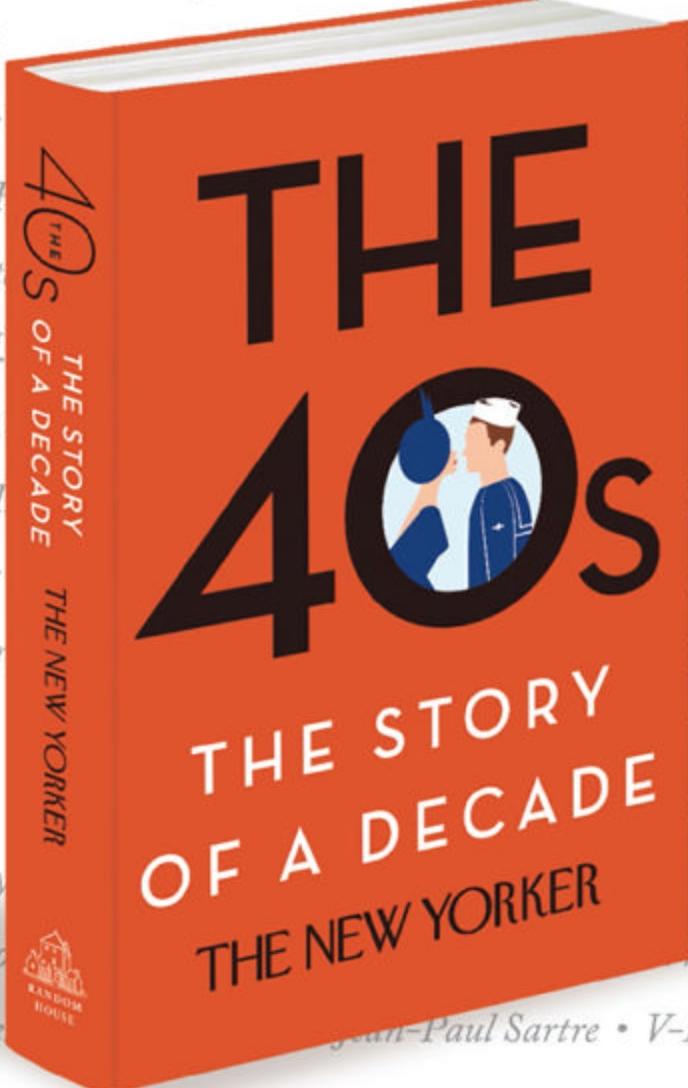
The real fight, in other words, was over money. To create the School of Advanced Study, the University of London, in 1994, brought together ten research institutes, including the Warburg. It wanted the Warburg, like the other institutes, to raise its own money, while the Warburg thought that the university ought to support it indefinitely, because that was what the trust deed said it would do. It was, in a way, a mordant echo of the bigger controversies rocking Europe, not entirely unlike Germany's efforts to force Greece to behave more "responsibly," while Greece claimed that responsible behavior was not captured by



"Ow! Ow! Hot! Hot! Hot! Ow! Hot!"

HISTORY IN REAL TIME AS TOLD BY THE NEW YORKER

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a bottom line but lay in being responsible to its true constituency. Supporting humanistic ventures that could not be expected to support themselves was exactly the point of having churches and universities—or so the clergymen with their sinecures and the professors with their tenure like to insist. One irony among many, of course, was that Aby Warburg, the man who started it all, was able to do so only because his family had, for so many generations, thought that the only way Jews like them could flourish would be if they made lots of money, and could do what they wanted with it.

Few words are as overused in our time as “icon” and its variant “iconic.” Any celebrity whose face is still recognizable a decade after her death is, as Clive James once suggested, an icon. Soup cans and Coke bottles are icons, as are the faces of the men who made soup cans and Coke bottles into icons. Aby Warburg, as much as anyone, is responsible for that turn. Before him, “icon” was largely a religious term, for what Byzantines were always quarreling about; Warburg, and the practice that he founded, took it over to mean the potent symbolic images of Western art.

Warburg first visited Italy in the late eighteen-eighties. It was a time when the history of Renaissance art revolved either around connoisseurship—the craft of saying who painted what when—or, in Germany, around a tradition in which the art of one epoch or another was shown to reflect the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age. In the case of the Florentine Renaissance, that spirit was assumed to be one of humanist materialism trumping medieval symbolism. Botticelli’s naked Venus rose above the waves to indicate the reborn triumph of pagan flesh over prudish pedantry.

Warburg, immersed in the Florentine libraries and their documents, began to discover that much of the painting he loved was deeply rooted in more ancient practices, particularly in astrology and other kinds of semi-magical beliefs, and in religious doctrines, some of them very esoteric. A new idea of the Renaissance began to emerge in his mind: not a burst of materialism and humanism against cramped learning but an eruption of certain recurring ancient ideas and images—icons. In 1912, he dubbed this new “science” of art history “iconology.” Half anthropology,

THE APOLOGY

Tonight outside the plate glass
each insect is made of a long tube of wood,
as if the insect had become a tree
to give the tree a voice.
And these pink spatters,
these crumbled parlor doilies,
these milkweed blossoms
fade as if antique,
and the milkweed does not report on the condition of its leaves,
the height of its flowers,
its life without bureaucracy,
nor does the lilac filtering the mentholated air,
or the bee drowsing on the sill
after straining through the broken window screen
like Rilke wheedling his way into a palace.
Or the brook that runs by the cabin
talking nonsense.
Or the willow that slouches as if it were in a classroom
where the teacher bores it.
So forgive me please already.
I am sorry for speaking for nature.
But it was asking for it.

—Lee Upton

half aestheticism, it took the material of art to be a parade of symbolic images, proliferating, crossbreeding, evolving. Botticelli’s mythologies, including “The Birth of Venus,” weren’t a humanist rejection of the medieval for the affirmation of lived experience; they were dark philosophical codes, which needed to be broken in order to be enjoyed.

In 1895, Warburg, with an intrepid spirit for so fragile a being, travelled to the American Southwest, where he immersed himself in the culture of the Hopi Indians. Or thought he had: inevitably, his vision of the Hopi was colored by the expectations of a nineteenth-century German. (“If Nietzsche had only been familiar with the data of anthropology and folklore!” he wrote, typically and touchingly, some years after his Southwestern sojourn.) But his experience of the “indigenous” deepened and universalized his instincts about the role of images across cultures. The Hopi were really not that far from Renaissance Florentines. They, too, “stand on middle ground between magic and logos, and their instrument of orientation is the symbol,” he wrote. The symbol is the primitive enduring virus that temporarily makes art its home.

Warburg’s ideas are often not just bafflingly inbred but expressed in crunchy impenetrable German compounds. It is a brave man who would attempt to simplify them too sharply. Nonetheless, his theory of pictures might be summed up in three words: Poses have power. The repeated poses of art—young girls dancing, snakes entwining, the moment of the kill in the hunt, the confrontation of sea and single figure—are parts of an ongoing inheritance, a natural language of visual meaning that we all understand without having been consciously instructed in it. Warburg’s favorite illustration was what he called the “Nympha” figure: the young woman in flowing drapery who gives the illusion of rapid and graceful movement and can be found dancing through Western art for two thousand years, from Hellenistic sarcophagi to Botticelli’s “Primavera” and Isadora Duncan.

Like all powerful things, such poses are double-edged. There is a white image magic that feeds humanism and infuses art with healthy Dionysian passion, and there is a black image magic that causes us to surrender reason to ravishments of our own fixations. Although Warburg died before Nazism came to a head, he

knew very well the appeal of “Dionysian” imagery to modern people desiccated by rationality. As the long “memory traces” of mankind—Warburg referred to these as “engrams”—reach us through recurring images, we can be overwhelmed by them or we can organize them. The constellations of astrology are a perfect illustration of his point. There are no rams and bears and heroes in the sky, controlling our behavior. The patterns aren’t real, but they trap us into imagining that they are. Yet the act of organization that the constellations represent proved to be essential to rational science, giving us mathematics through imagination.

Warburg’s ideas about images were so complex and self-cancelling that, as time went on, he felt they could be expressed only as images. He created large collages of maps, manuscript pages, and photographs taken from many sources, high and low alike, including his beloved Nympha figure, and arrayed them on black linen screens. Although the originals did not survive, photographs of his “Mnemosyne Atlas” are what decorate the Warburg Library’s stairwell.

Original systems are usually organic and improvisational in nature. Most often, the immediate followers of the organic master cannot quite absorb the system; they can only axiomatize it. Warburg’s system was axiomatized by his colleague and sometime student Erwin Panofsky, who moved Warburg’s iconology in the direction of the academic study of “iconography,” the demanding but ultimately simpler decoding of the set symbols that filled Renaissance and post-Renaissance painting up to the time of Manet: dogs were a sign of fidelity, unlit candles of virginity about to end, and so on. But anyone who looked into the turbulent, shifting waters of Warburg’s actual beliefs knew that there was something more, and much stranger, there. At a minimum, there was something compellingly incongruous: on the one hand, his vision was haunted by half-clothed women dancing ecstatic Dionysian dances; on the other, it was devoted to minute archival research meant to record their choreography through time.

London last fall, or some circles of it, was filled with rumors about the decision that the judge in the lawsuit, one Dame Sonia Proudman, who had been considering the case for several

months, would make. The betting was that she would break the deed, since it was so clearly burdensome to the university, and because it had been made in such strange and hurried circumstances. Charles Hope, a recent director of the institute, and the leader of its “loyalists,” told me that, in his view, the deed, far from being the hastily scribbled wartime gift of legend, was in truth a much considered and political act on the part of the British establishment, merely endorsed by the final paper. “What people don’t understand is that the decision to absorb the library wasn’t simply an act of absent-minded philanthropy,” Hope said. “It was made at very high levels of British government, and was intimately connected to other decisions about art, including the beginnings of the Courtauld Institute.”

Among those who might be called the semi-loyalists, the sense arose that the real problem was not in fact monetary but intellectual—that the Warburg had lost its way for the paradoxical reason that its greatest director had been out of sympathy with the library’s founding premise. Oscar Wilde says that every great man has disciples and that Judas writes the biography. Gombrich, the institute’s director from 1959 to 1976, and the official biographer of its founder, was hardly a Judas, but he was certainly a Josephus—a doubter of the obsessional causes of his time, including Warburg’s.



Gombrich’s great work involved mapping the methods of the sciences, their search for new knowledge through self-correcting experiment, onto the history of painting. Art, he thought, progresses rationally, as science does. He had a horror of romantic irrationalism of all kinds; it was, he thought, at the heart of the Nazism that had destroyed Germany’s intellectual heritage and sent a generation of European scholars, himself included, into exile. The implicitly

“Jungian” nature of Warburg’s later work—with its call to shared cultural spirits, to archetypes in the sky and engrams in the brain—bore for him too close a resemblance to ideas of blood and racial memory.

It’s clear that Gombrich, although he doesn’t quite say so in his “Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography” (1970), believed that by the end Warburg’s thinking had many obviously loony aspects, and that his collages of poses had some of the indiscriminate, free-associating character of schizophrenic art. (Warburg’s son, Max, who suffered from many of the difficulties that had afflicted his father, was often at the institute in the sixties and seventies, and some felt that Gombrich was less than perfectly sympathetic to him. “Of course, you couldn’t expect the director to have much time for the troubled son,” one witness to the time says, “but when Max appeared at the Warburg teas, I was always dismayed by the way Gombrich paid so little attention to him.”)

For Gombrich, the continuities of art were not the result of engrams stuck in the mind. They were traditions near at hand, hypotheses attempting to solve problems, rather than recurrent images haunting the collective unconscious. The Nympha kept coming back for the same reason that every musical comedy has a second lead who sings soprano: it is a convention. “Gombrich did not create a school or attract scholars to succeed him,” Saumarez Smith told me. “I remember him at his eighty-fifth-birthday dinner being very contemptuous of those who came after him, a Grand Old Man who had had no succession plan and, like some grand intellectual figures, felt that no one was up to the job of succeeding him.”

In the years since Gombrich’s biography of Warburg, however, what once seemed suspicious or wacky in the Warburg tradition has become cool, and even trendy. In the past two years alone, at least ten scholarly books on Warburg and his work have been published. There are fashions in academia as in everything else, and Warburg has never been more fashionable. The contradictions, the fragmentary achievement, the image-mongering: crazy scholars with strange ideas now attract rather than repel us, and we are sufficiently far from the disasters

of Romanticism to once again be open to its joys. Free association liberates us from the canon, and contradiction fires weapons against the logocentric mind. We can even look at the German Romantic fascination with a shared unconscious without immediately thinking of Auschwitz.

As a consequence, Warburg is now seen increasingly as an early master of modern disorder, a bookend and rival to Walter Benjamin. But where Benjamin famously saw mass reproduction as separating art from ritual, mystery, and “aura,” Warburg’s vision was more like that of a banker: images were a currency, circulating freely through time, and even collecting compound interest as they aged. We reaped the profits as images proliferated, growing in intensity and varieties of possible meaning: *Nympha*, born on a sarcophagus, could, multiplying through the ages, end happily on a stamp.

Warburg’s most influential student in the English-speaking world was, of all people, Kenneth Clark, the mandarin overseer of the British art establishment from the thirties through the seventies. In fact, one of the most living reminiscences of Warburg is a short one in Clark’s autobiography “Another Part of the Wood.” Clark was the prize pupil of Bernard Berenson, the master of connoisseurship. Hearing Warburg lecture in Rome in 1928 altered Clark’s entire world picture. “Warburg was without doubt the most original thinker on art-history of our time, and entirely changed the course of art-historical studies,” Clark wrote. “He had, to an uncanny degree, the gift of mimesis. He could ‘get inside’ a character, so that when he quoted from Savonarola, one seemed to hear the Frate’s high, compelling voice; and when he read from Poliziano there was all the daintiness and the slight artificiality of the Medicean circle. . . . Warburg, who preferred to talk to an individual, directed the whole lecture at me. It lasted over two hours, and I understood about two thirds. But it was enough.” Though Clark remained outside the faculty of the Warburg Institute proper, his beautifully lucid writings, in popular books like “The Nude,” brought Warburg’s ideas to a broad audience.

Clark, in the second volume of his

autobiography, mentions in passing his 1961–62 Slade Lectures at Oxford, on what he called “Motives”—recurrent patterns of poses in art. I wondered if the lectures survived in some form, and, recalling that Clark, elsewhere in his memoirs, writes that he had never given an “improvised” lecture, decided, while I waited for the Warburg judgment to come down, to seek them out in the Clark archives, at the Tate.

The manuscript did indeed survive, complete and unpublished, and I spent hours turning over its pages at a carrel there. The “Motives” lectures were perhaps the best thing of Clark’s I had ever read: a Warburgian investigation of a set number of poses—“where the fusion of form and subject . . . has taken a recognizable shape, either because it recurs with unquestionable power over a long period, or because, over a short period, it is used with compulsive intensity.” Clark set out to explain where the poses began, where they went, and why they mattered. The motives that he examined included the child (almost invariably the infant Jesus turning in contrapposto toward its mother’s breast and face), two figures embracing, the image of a wild beast devouring a horse, and the “ecstatic spiral,” a form that unites primitive decoration and the epiphanies of Baroque ceilings.

There was something pleasingly archaic about reading lectures given so long ago, and still full of the speaker’s housekeeping notes: “Next Thursday it will be the motive of *Encounter*—the experience of two people meeting in love. On the 16th it will be the motive of the *Pillar and the Trunk*—the act of defying the law of gravitation; and on the 23rd it will be the *Recumbent Figure*—the act of accepting the law of gravity. I shall not give a lecture on the 29th.” What gives the lectures their force, though, is their easy Warburgianism. “Motives are states of mind which have taken visible shape,” Clark explains. “They are thus very similar to the subject of a lyric poem or a piece of music; with this difference that the poem or musical composition can develop in time, whereas the visual motive has to compress all conflicting or amplifying associations into a single symbol. This intense concentration seems to explain why recurring motives are so few and so tenaciously held.” From Warburg, Clark had taken over not only the core

idea that poses have power but a sense of how they communicate from generation to generation. Popular imagery could “carry” an image more effectively than art: “Indeed, it often seems as if the ‘carrier’ of a motive *needs* to be artistically worthless in order that the artist who uses it should feel a greater urge to bring it to perfection.”

Perhaps the most beautiful set piece in the lectures comes in the one on the “ecstatic spiral,” a lecture obviously haunted by Warburg’s *Nympha*: “We twist in agony, we twist in ecstasy, we twirl in the dance. A leaf in an eddy of wind rises in a spiral, so does a waterspout. Flames curl upwards, to comfort or destroy, as matter is transformed into energy.” Clark ends this last lecture with the note that this spirit “now can find expression only in music and dancing. Although our buildings are as rigid as gridirons, we still find release and emotional satisfaction in the Twist.” Clark may have been making a donnish jest—you can almost hear the dry laughter in the lecture hall—but he was also on to something real: Warburg’s engrams of energy are now more often pop than not.

There were, of course, no images attached to the manuscript, and the “lantern slides” that Clark used I assumed had been lost. So, as I read, I had the thought that, with the Tate archive blessed by Wi-Fi, I could search for the images Clark was citing right on my laptop. I went to Google Images, and there they were, the embracing emperors and brides and the ecstatic spirals of the Baroque. Indeed, there were motives from far more sources than one could have imagined. The Google Images search instantly brought forth embraces in Rembrandt and encounters in Facebook photographs, ecstatic spirals not just in rococo ceilings but in Robert Smithson’s “Spiral Jetty” and in fusilli pasta with spiral-cut zucchini. It occurred to me that there was a broader visual likeness here: the Google Images page eerily reproduces the form of the Warburg “Mnemosyne” screens—the horizontal rows of similar images, neatly framed in long boxes, and the vertical distribution of them irregularly across a surface.

Warburg’s essential insight—that imagery is viral, communicable, contagious, and crossbreeding—was, I realized, right. Reproductions, like the

black-and-white photographs that Warburg himself used, don't serve as stoppers to meaning; they serve as carriers of the force of symbols from imagination to imagination. This process, already accelerated in the Renaissance, goes still faster in our time, and is not just the primary dynamic of our visual experience but also the primary matter of our art. We live now on Mnemosyne screens. For good or ill, the methodology of visual serendipity is our own.

The decision about the fate of the Warburg, endlessly delayed, came down in early November. It was, remarkably, almost entirely in favor of the institute. The judge found the University of London responsible for the Warburg's upkeep, its continuation, and its integrity. Charles Hope wrote a triumphant piece in *The London Review of Books*: "The effect of this judgment has been to establish that the university has been in serious breach of the trust deed for many years. The Warburg Institute must now be adequately funded by the university."

Last month, it was announced, in a short statement, that the Warburg and the university had arrived at a "binding agreement" allowing them to "draw a line under past disagreements and look to the future." Then, just last week, it was announced that a new director had been chosen, from outside the institute: David Freedberg, a distinguished art historian who has been resident for many years at Columbia University, had agreed to take over the directorship, at a considerable reduction of salary; he will live in a small apartment in walking distance of the library.

Freedberg spent many formative years working at the library, and, like every newly created boss of an old institution with a high opinion of itself, he is obviously tactful about seeming to want to change the institution too radically. But he also makes it clear that he feels the Warburg has departed from some of the richer intellectual paths it pioneered. "In the past thirty years, the Warburg seemed, I think it's fair to say, to have become wary about exploring the lower and more basic levels of cultural formations—those rougher sides of culture, the superstitious and even the barbaric, which fascinated

Warburg himself," he said the other day. "Warburg was interested in the engines that sustained imagery in human minds and caused symbols to recur, rather than wanting to simply collect archival evidence of its persistence. There's been a reluctance to explore the sides of Warburg that were concerned with the irrational and the universal. We need to get back to thinking about the *Urformen* and the engrams in contemporary terms—to the study, including the neurological and scientific study, of culturally modulated gestures. The failure to understand that task contributed to the decline of the Warburg, even while, paradoxically, the public interest in Aby Warburg has grown.

"My dream of reviving the Warburg is a dream of making it the center of vigorous and vital cultural history in our time. It needs to engage with current debates, however dismaying. The Warburg is very well positioned to take a stand on crosscultural ethical issues, on cross-disciplinary issues—even questions of human rights. It can be, and, I hope, will be, more engaged with contemporary issues than it has ever been before."

Brooke Palmieri says that she feels "optimistic," but no more than that. "I think that the court case was really great as a wakeup call for the University of London," she says. "We've got twenty-five thousand more sets of eyes on the Warburg Institute than I would have thought possible. But there's a button on the Change.org petition page—you press it to declare your petition a success. Well, I haven't pushed that button." Lisa Jardine, for her part, notes, "I have a hard time believing that in the next five to ten years the situation will not arise again. Unless, of course, a major benefactor is found." Freedberg recognizes as well that the future will depend on ambitious fund-raising, a daunting task in a country where state funding is still more the norm for higher education than American-style private endowment. As bankers know, sooner or later someone will have to pay.

The decision was, in other words, a perfectly Warburgian event: conservative and reassuring to a pedantic degree, it was also potentially destabilizing. For the time being, the books are still there, open on their shelves, and in the stairwells the nymphs rejoice. ♦

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WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED

Gerry Adams has long denied being a member of the I.R.A. But his former compatriots claim that he authorized murder.

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE

Jean McConville had just taken a bath when the intruders knocked on the door. A small woman with a guarded smile, she was, at thirty-seven, a mother of ten. She was also a widow: her husband, Arthur, had died eleven months earlier, of cancer. The family continued to live in Divis Flats—a housing complex just off the Falls Road, in the heart of Catholic West Belfast—but had recently moved to a slightly larger apartment. The stove was not connected yet, so Jean's daughter Helen, who was fifteen, had gone to a nearby chip shop to bring back dinner. "Don't be stopping for a sneaky smoke," Jean told her. It was December, 1972, and already dark at 6:30 P.M. When the children heard the knock, they assumed that it was Helen with the food.

Four men and four women burst in; some wore balaclavas, others had covered their faces with nylon stockings that ghoulishly distorted their features. One brandished a gun. "Put your coat on," they told Jean. She trembled violently as they tried to pull her out of the apartment. "Help me!" she shrieked.

"I can remember trying to grab my mother," her son Michael told me recently. He was eleven at the time. "We were all crying. My mother was crying." Billy and Jim, six-year-old twins, threw their arms around Jean's legs and wailed. The intruders tried to calm the children by saying that they would bring their mother back: they just needed to talk to her, and she would be gone for only "a few hours." Archie, who, at sixteen, was the oldest child at home, asked if he could accompany his mother, and the members of the gang agreed. Jean McConville put on a tweed overcoat and a head scarf as the younger children were herded into one of the bedrooms. The intruders called the children by name. A couple of the men were not wearing masks, and Michael realized, to his horror, that the people tak-

ing his mother away were not strangers—they were his neighbors.

Divis Flats had been constructed in the late nineteen-sixties, in one of those fits of architectural utopianism that yield dystopian results. A "slum clearance" program had razed a neighborhood of narrow, overcrowded nineteenth-century dwellings, replacing them with a hulking complex of eight hundred and fifty units. To Michael McConville, Divis's warren of balconies and ramps seemed like "a maze for rats." By 1972, it had become a stronghold for the Irish Republican Army, which was waging an escalating guerrilla battle against the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and loyalist paramilitary groups. A nineteen-story tower stood on one edge of Divis. It was one of the tallest buildings in Belfast, and the British Army had established an operational post on the top two floors. Because this aerie was in the middle of enemy territory, there were times when the British could get to it only by helicopter. From the rooftop, British snipers traded fire with I.R.A. gunmen below. Michael and his siblings had grown accustomed to the reverberation of bombs and the percussion of gun battles. On bad nights, the children dragged their mattresses off the beds and away from the windows and slept on the floor.

The I.R.A. had disabled the elevators at Divis to hamper British patrols, so the masked gang hustled Jean and Archie McConville down a stairwell. When they reached the bottom, one of the men pointed a gun at Archie's face, so close that he could feel the cold barrel on his skin, and said, "Fuck off." Archie was just a boy, outnumbered and unarmed. He reluctantly ascended the stairs. On the second level, one of the walls was perforated with a series of vertical slats. Peering through the holes, Archie watched as his mother was bundled into a Volkswagen van and driven away.

The disappearance of Jean McConville was eventually recognized as one of the worst atrocities that occurred during the long conflict in Northern Ireland known as the Troubles. But at the time no one, except the McConville children, seemed especially concerned. When Helen returned home, she and Archie went out to look for Jean, but nobody could—or would—tell them anything about where she had been taken or when she might be back. Some weeks later, a social worker visited the apartment and noted, in a report, that the McConville children had been "looking after themselves." Their neighbors in Divis Flats were aware of the kidnapping, as was a local parish priest, but, according to the report, they were "unsympathetic."

Rumors circulated that McConville hadn't been abducted at all—that she had abandoned her children and eloped with a British soldier. In Belfast, this was an incendiary allegation: Catholic women who consorted with the enemy were sometimes punished by being tied to a lamppost after having their heads shaved and their bodies tarred and feathered. The McConvilles were a "mixed" family; Jean was born Protestant and converted to Catholicism only after meeting her husband. The family had lived with Jean's mother, in a predominantly Protestant neighborhood in East Belfast, until 1969, when they were driven out, as internecine tensions sharpened. They sought refuge in West Belfast, only to discover that they were outsiders there as well. Several weeks after the abduction, on January 17, 1973, a crew from the BBC visited the apartment and taped a segment. As the younger siblings huddled on the sofa—pale children with downcast eyes, looking shy and frightened—the reporters asked Helen if she had any idea why her mother had left. "No," she said, shaking her head. Agnes McConville, who



Clockwise from top right: Dolours Price; Gerry Adams; Jean McConville and three of her children; I.R.A. men at the funeral of Bobby Sands; Divis Flats, the Belfast housing project from which McConville was abducted.

was thirteen, noted, hopefully, that her mother was wearing red slippers when she was taken away. She added, “We’ll keep our fingers crossed and pray hard for her to come back.”

But there was reason to believe that something terrible had happened to Jean McConville. About a week after she was kidnapped, a young man had come to the door and handed the children their mother’s purse and three rings that she had been wearing when she left: her engagement ring, her wedding ring, and an eternity ring that Arthur had given her. The children asked where Jean was. “I don’t know anything about your mother,” the man said. “I was just told to give you these.” When I spoke to Michael recently, he said, “I knew then, though I was only eleven years of age, that my mother was dead.”

His siblings were not so quickly convinced. The act of “disappearing” someone, which the International Criminal Court has classified as a crime against humanity, is so pernicious, in part, because it can leave the loved ones of the victim in a purgatory of uncertainty. “You cannot mourn someone who has not died,” the Argentine-Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman once observed. Helen and Archie reported Jean’s abduction to the police, but in the files of the Royal Ulster Constabulary there is no record of any investigation at the time. McConville’s body did not turn up. And so some of the children held out hope for years that they had not been orphaned, and that their mother might suddenly reappear. Perhaps she had developed amnesia and was living in another country, unaware that she had left a whole life behind in Belfast. But, as decades passed without word, these fantasies became increasingly difficult to sustain. For all the gnawing irresolution, there was one clear explanation. Michael’s sister Susan, who was eight when Jean was taken, told me that she knew, eventually, that her mother was dead, because otherwise “she would have found her way back to us.”

After several months of fending for themselves, the McConville children were separated by the state, and the younger ones were dispersed to different orphanages. The older ones found jobs and places to live. The siblings saw each other infrequently and never spoke

of what happened to their mother. One by-product of the Troubles was a culture of silence; with armed factions at war in the streets, making inquiries could be dangerous. At one point, a posse of boys from the youth wing of the I.R.A. beat Michael McConville and stabbed him in the leg with a penknife. They released him with a warning: *Don’t talk about what happened to your mother.* As the children grew older, they occasionally saw their former neighbors around Belfast, and recognized individuals who had come to the apartment that night. But, as Archie McConville told me, “you can’t do nothing. They walk past you like nothing happened.”

Then, in 1994, the I.R.A. declared a ceasefire. Gerry Adams, the bearded revolutionary who was the president of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Republican movement, had entered into peace negotiations with the British government, attempting to persuade the I.R.A. to abandon armed resistance and tolerate a continued British presence in Northern Ireland. As Tim Pat Coogan observes in the 2002 edition of his book “The I.R.A.,” a peace deal would be visionary, but also highly risky for Adams, because “his life would not be worth a cent should it be thought that he was selling out the ‘armed struggle.’” Through perseverance and political savvy, Adams succeeded, and in 1998 he helped create the Good Friday Agreement, which brought an end to the Troubles. As the peace process got under way, the I.R.A. agreed to help locate bodies that its members had buried in hidden graves during the seventies.

Though Adams is the most famous face of the Irish Republican movement, he has long denied having been a member of the I.R.A. He maintains that he never played any operational role in the violence of the Troubles, and that he confined himself to the leadership of Sinn Fein. As the chief Republican delegate involved in peace negotiations, however, he was obliged to confront the matter of forced disappearances, and he met on several occasions with the McConville children. Adams himself grew up in a family of ten children, and he conveyed his sympathies to the McConvilles. “There is no doubt the I.R.A. killed your mother,” he said. He told them that he did not know who had

authorized the killing or carried it out, or where Jean McConville was buried. But he pledged to investigate.

Michael McConville told Adams that he wanted an apology. Adams parsed his words with precision. “For what it’s worth, I’ll apologize to you,” he said. “It was wrong for the Republican movement to do what they did to your mother.”

The first person to speak publicly about involvement in the disappearance of Jean McConville was a former I.R.A. terrorist named Dolours Price. In 2010, Price revealed in a series of interviews that she had been a member of a secret I.R.A. unit called the Unknowns, which conducted clandestine paramilitary work, including disappearances. Price did not participate in the raid on the McConville house, but she drove Jean McConville across the border into the Republic of Ireland, where she was executed. McConville, Price claimed, had been acting as an informer for the British Army, providing intelligence about I.R.A. activity in Divis Flats. The order to disappear her came from the Officer Commanding of the Belfast Brigade of the Provisional I.R.A.—the man who held ultimate authority over the Unknowns. According to Price, the Officer Commanding was Gerry Adams.

Dolours Price liked to tell people that Irish Republicanism was in her DNA. As a little girl in Belfast, she sat on the knee of her father, Albert, and listened to stories about how, as a teen-ager in the forties, he had taken part in an I.R.A. bombing campaign in England. Her aunt Bridie Dolan, who lived with the family, had been horribly disfigured at twenty-seven, after accidentally dropping a cache of gelignite in an I.R.A. explosives dump. The blast blew off both of her hands, and permanently blinded her. “It was never a case of ‘Poor Bridie,’” Dolours’s younger sister Marian told the journalist Suzanne Breen, in 2004. “We were just proud of her sacrifice. She came home from hospital to a wee house with an outside toilet, no social worker, no disability allowance, and no counselling. She just got on with it.” Bridie was a chain smoker, and Dolours and Marian would light cigarettes and insert them between her lips.

By the late sixties, Dolours was a striking and impetuous teen-ager, with a moon face, blue-green eyes, and dark-red hair. She and Marian attended teacher-training school, but she gravitated to radical politics, taking part in civil-rights demonstrations and travelling to Milan to give a talk on “British repression” at the headquarters of a Maoist political group. Tensions had persisted in Northern Ireland since 1920, when the Irish War of Independence led to the partition of the island, ultimately resulting in an independent republic of twenty-six counties in the south and continued British dominion over six counties in the north. The I.R.A. had its origins in that conflict, and after partition the organization devoted itself to trying to force the British to withdraw altogether. Catholics in the north were subjected to rampant discrimination in housing and jobs, and, with the advent of the Troubles, in 1969, these tensions exploded in violence. New paramilitary groups loyal to the British Crown were emerging, including the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defense Association, and that January loyalist mobs attacked civil-rights protesters as they marched from Belfast to Derry. In August, a member of the Royal

Ulster Constabulary fired a machine gun into Divis Flats, killing a nine-year-old Catholic boy, Patrick Rooney—the first child to die in the Troubles. The R.U.C. raided the Price house repeatedly during this period, suspicious of Albert Price’s I.R.A. connections. In 1971, the British reintroduced the controversial tactic of “internment”—imprisoning indefinitely, and without trial, anyone suspected of Republican activity. But the policy backfired, radicalizing a new generation of recruits to the Republican cause. The Provisional I.R.A., a more aggressive offshoot of the official I.R.A., began preparing for a sustained guerrilla campaign. Dolours Price set out to join the Provisionals.

Historically, women had enlisted in the I.R.A.’s female wing, known as the Cumann na mBan (Irishwomen’s Council). Dolours Price’s mother and grandmother had both been members of this group. But Dolours did not want to bandage men’s wounds, she said—she wanted to be “a fighting soldier.” The leadership of the Provisional I.R.A. convened a special meeting to consider her case, and, in August, 1971, Price became the first woman admitted to full membership in the I.R.A. She was twenty.

Marian soon joined her in the I.R.A.

Dolours later said, “I should be ashamed to admit there was fun in it in those days.” People are often drawn to radicalism by a sense of community and shared purpose. In this case, there was also glory. I.R.A. members referred to themselves not as soldiers or terrorists but as “volunteers”—a signal that they were prepared to sacrifice their lives for the cause.

Educated, attractive young women had not been seen carrying guns on the rubble-strewn streets of Belfast before, and the Price sisters acquired an iconic glamour. “They were sassy girls,” Eamonn McCann, a longtime friend of the sisters, told me. “They weren’t cold-eyed dialecticians or fanatics on the surface. There was a smile about them.” One press account described them as “pretty girls who would finish their school work and then take to the streets armed, one or both hiding an Armalite rifle under their raincoat, to take part in gun battles with the British army.” The sisters became the subject of sexualized lore, with stories circulating about Marian, in a miniskirt, charming her way past a British Army checkpoint while driving a car full of explosives. At the time, there was a shopping center in Belfast called Crazy Prices, and,



“No, I’m still getting too much banjo.”

inevitably, the sisters became known as the Crazy Prices. Another friend of the sisters told me that Dolours was drawn to the I.R.A., in some measure, by “rebel chic.”

During this period, Dolours crossed paths with Gerry Adams. He was a former bartender from Ballymurphy, a lean young man with sharp cheekbones and black-framed eyeglasses. Like Dolours, he had grown up in a Belfast family deeply rooted in the I.R.A. It is believed that Adams joined the organization as a teen-ager, in the mid-sixties. Several former I.R.A. volunteers confirmed to me that Adams was a member of the group, and a photograph taken at a Belfast funeral in 1970 captures him wearing the black beret that was an unofficial uniform of the organization. In March, 1972, the British government interned Adams on the Maidstone, a British prison ship, but in June he was released so that he could represent an I.R.A. delegation in secret peace talks with the British. Dolours and Marian Price picked him up and drove him into Belfast to rejoin the Republican leadership. (The talks were unsuccessful.) A U.S. diplomatic cable in January, 1973, reported that Adams was “an active Belfast military commander.”

Nevertheless, Adams did not carry out operations. In a 2010 documentary,

“Voices from the Grave,” Dolours Price recalls, “Gerry didn’t allow himself to be in the presence of guns, or in any situation that would put him at risk of arrest.” Instead, he deputized operational work to his close friend Brendan Hughes, a compact man with bushy black eyebrows and a shock of black hair. Hughes, who was known as the Dark, brought military cunning to the job, along with a measure of glee. He lived “from operation to operation,” he said later. “Robbing banks, robbing post offices, robbing trains, planting bombs, shooting Brits, trying to stay alive.” To Dolours Price, Hughes seemed like “a giant of a man.” He inspired fierce loyalty from his subordinates, because he fought alongside them and “asked no volunteer to do what he would not do himself.”

Hughes had been a merchant seaman before joining the I.R.A., and one day a sailor he knew showed him a brochure for a new assault rifle from America—the Armalite. “We all fell in love with this weapon,” Hughes recalled. The Armalite was ideal for urban warfare: lightweight and powerful, with a retractable stock that made it easy to conceal. According to Hughes, Adams dispatched him to New York to procure Armalites, using a network of sympathetic arms dealers. Hughes devised an

ingenious plan to ship the guns back to Ireland. In 1969, the Queen Elizabeth 2 began making stately transatlantic crossings between Southampton and New York. The ship had a crew of a thousand; many of them were Irish, and some secretly worked for Brendan Hughes. And so a ship named after the Queen of England was used to smuggle weapons to the I.R.A. On Belfast’s streets, graffiti heralded the guns’ arrival: “God made the Catholics, but the Armalite made them equal.”

For much of the sixties, the I.R.A. had just a few dozen members, and was therefore easy to track. Now there were hundreds of recruits; more sophisticated tactics, with the advent of the Provisional I.R.A.; and new leaders, like Adams. The British authorities were caught off guard. When Brendan Hughes became active in the I.R.A., his father destroyed the family’s photographs of him, so that British forces could not identify him by sight. Similarly, pictures of Adams were so rare that, for a time, the British authorities could not say for sure what he looked like. In Adams’s autobiography, “Before the Dawn,” he describes British troops capturing his dog, Shane, and taking him for a walk on a leash, in the hope that he might lead them to his owner. Adams and Hughes became targets of assassination, and they perpetually moved among safe houses, counting on support from the community in West Belfast. Armored personnel carriers roamed the Falls Road and helicopters hovered overhead; local residents removed street signs to disorient British patrols, and rattled the lids of trash bins to sound the alarm. While Hughes and his men were fleeing soldiers in a foot chase, a front door might suddenly open, allowing them to duck inside. When Adams moved around the city during this period, he later wrote, he “avoided streets where there were stretches without doors.”

In 1972, the British Army launched a clever operation. It set up a washing service called Four Square Laundry, issued coupons offering steep discounts, then sent a van into Catholic neighborhoods to pick up and drop off clothes. The coupons were color-coded, so the clothing could be subjected to forensic testing for traces of gunpowder



or explosives, and then correlated with delivery addresses to identify houses that were being used by the I.R.A. The Four Square operation was exposed after the I.R.A. interrogated one of its members, Seamus Wright, and discovered that he had been working as a double agent for the British. Gunmen strafed the Four Square van, killing the driver; according to the I.R.A., they also killed two men who were hiding in a secret compartment under the roof. Dolours Price then drove Wright and one of his colleagues—a seventeen-year-old named Kevin McKee, who was also discovered to have been a traitor—into the Republic, where they were executed, and secretly buried, in the fall of 1972.

After I.R.A. leaders learned that the British were cultivating double agents, they established a unit to identify “touts”—informers—and other disloyal elements. Jean McConville moved to Divis Flats as this climate of paranoia was taking hold.

One day when Michael McConville was a young boy, his father brought home two pigeons. Michael was allowed to keep them in “a wee box” in his room, he told me, and his father fostered an interest in pigeon racing. After the family moved to West Belfast, Michael and his friends began stalking derelict houses where pigeons roosted. Whenever he found a bird, he peeled off his jacket and cast it like a net over the animal, then smuggled it home under his sweater, adding it to his burgeoning fleet. West Belfast was a hazardous place for an adventurous kid, but Michael had no fear, he told me: “Most boys didn’t, being brought up in a war zone.” On one occasion, he scaled the façade of an old mill only to discover a unit of British soldiers encamped inside. Startled, they trained their rifles on him and bellowed at him to climb back down.

“You had no respect for the law, because all’s you seen is brutality,” Michael recalled. “The soldiers getting men against the wall, kicking their legs spread-eagle. That’s what put the seed in a lot of kids’ heads to join the I.R.A.” He sighed. “I don’t think the British had much of a clue about what they were starting.”

Michael is fifty-three, slight and taciturn, with clipped gray hair, flushed

cheeks, and his mother’s pursed mouth. When I visited him last summer, at the bright, modern house that he built in a rural area a short drive from Belfast, he showed me a framed photograph of his mother. It’s a famous image, the only surviving photo of Jean McConville: a grainy shot from the sixties taken outside the family’s old house, in East Belfast. Jean smiles tentatively at the camera, her dark hair pulled away from her face, her arms crossed. Three of her chil-



dren are perched on a window ledge beside her, while Arthur crouches, grinning, in the foreground. Arthur was older than Jean; he had fought the Japanese in Burma during the Second World War. When their first child, Anne, was born, in 1954, Jean was only seventeen.

After Arthur died, it was a struggle to feed ten children, even with his Army pension. “She just wasn’t coping,” Michael said, adding that she had a nervous breakdown. When I brought up the claim that his mother was an informer, Michael asked, with indignation, “When would she have had the time?” She was constantly on her feet, he said, cooking stews or washing clothes on a scrubbing board in the kitchen sink. After Arthur’s death, Jean’s attention to cleaning took on a compulsive intensity. Because one child or the other was forever losing a button or needing some other repair, she always had a large blue safety pin—a “nappy pin,” Michael calls it—fastened to her clothes. It was her defining accessory.

Not long before Jean McConville was taken away, she raised the suspicions of her neighbors. She and the children were home one night when they heard a man moaning in pain outside their front door. Jean cautiously opened the door and discovered a wounded British soldier sprawled on the landing. He had been shot. Jean tended to him,

and brought him a pillow. “That’s just who my mother was,” Michael said. “She would have helped anyone.” The next day, someone painted the words “Brit Lover” on the front door. Jean had a brother, Tom, who sometimes visited from East Belfast. According to Susan and Archie, he occasionally came to Divis outfitted in an orange sash, the traditional Unionist symbol; to make such a provocation in a West Belfast Catholic neighborhood was an act of suicidal folly. Nevertheless, Jean had converted to Catholicism, and her children were Catholic. At the time of her abduction, her oldest son, Robert, was interned in prison for suspected activity in the official I.R.A.

Jean McConville’s one indulgence was a weekly outing to play bingo. One night, she was interrupted during the game by someone who told her that one of her children had been injured and that a car was waiting outside to take her to the local hospital. Several hours later, British soldiers discovered her wandering through the streets, barefoot and disoriented. Apparently, she had been detained by an armed group and then released. Her face was swollen and badly bruised—she had been beaten. When the soldiers brought her home, “she was talking in riddles,” Michael recalled. The children couldn’t figure out what had happened to her. They made her tea, and she smoked one cigarette after another.

When his mother was taken away the second time, and did not return, Michael said, “There was no one to look after us. I kept getting put in different homes, but each time I would run away.” He recalled an orphanage where monks walked through the dormitory at night with a roving flashlight, taking boys from their beds. Michael was not abused himself, but his younger brother Billy, who was sent to a Catholic orphanage in Kircubbin, recently told a panel investigating past abuses that he had been sexually molested. Michael eventually ended up at a facility that was surrounded by a ten-foot electrified fence. “It was the best home I ever had,” he told me. A kind nun took an interest in him, and he started to pull his life together. He met his wife, Angela, when he was sixteen. He has had a steady career installing tiles, and,

unlike several of his siblings, has avoided the ravages of drugs and alcohol. He and Angela have four children, and he boasted about them a bit. “I’ve tried my best, given the life I had, to do well with the kids,” he said.

In South Africa, after the fall of apartheid, the government initiated a process of “truth and reconciliation.” So that a thorough record of past abuses might be compiled, perpetrators were offered immunity from prosecution in exchange for honest testimony. In Northern Ireland, where roughly thirty-six hundred people were murdered during the Troubles and some forty thousand wounded, there has been no comprehensive accounting. A recent report by Amnesty International criticizes the “piecemeal” investigations of historical abuses, and suggests that, “across the political spectrum, it is those in power who may fear that they have little politically to gain—and possibly much to lose—from any careful examination of Northern Ireland’s past.” In 1999, with the encouragement of Bill Clinton, the British and Irish governments established the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains, and the I.R.A. agreed to identify the graves of nine people who had been murdered and secretly buried during the Troubles, but only after securing a promise that no criminal prosecutions would result. The I.R.A. declared that some of the disappeared had been informers, including Jean McConville. Michael and his siblings angrily rejected this characterization, yet they had little choice but to work with the I.R.A. to search for her remains.

Much of the Irish landscape is dominated by peat bogs; the anaerobic and acidic conditions in the densely packed earth mean that the past in Ireland can be subject to macabre resurrection. Peat cutters occasionally churn up ancient mandibles, clavicles, or entire cadavers that have been preserved for millennia. The bodies date as far back as the Bronze Age, and often show signs of ritual sacrifice and violent death. These victims, cast out of their communities and buried, have surfaced vividly intact, from their hair to their leathery skin. The poet Seamus Heaney, who harvested peat as a boy on his family’s

farm, once described the bogs of Ireland as “a landscape that remembered everything that had happened in and to it.”

In the summer of 1999, Jean McConville’s daughter Helen learned, through two priests who were serving as intermediaries, that the I.R.A. had identified the place where her mother’s body could be found: a stretch of windswept coastline outside Carlingford, in County Louth, on the east coast of the Republic. As backhoes prepared to tear up the soil, Helen convened her siblings around a table. It was an awkward reunion. Many of them had not seen one another in years. Edgy and fractious, their grief still palpable, they were now in their thirties and forties but looked older; their faces were haggard, and the hands and forearms of the men were etched with blotchy, blue-black tattoos. When Jean’s children spoke of her, even to one another, they had a tendency to refer to her as “my mother.”

“Where are we going to bury her?” Michael asked.

“West Belfast,” Helen responded. (A 1999 documentary, “Disappeared,” captured the exchange.) “It’s going to hit them. They were the ones that killed her. They were the ones that robbed us of a mother.”

Some of her brothers had reservations. “We all live in Republican areas,” Jim said. “We don’t want no hassle from them.” He continued, “Them boys who done it, they’ll suffer for the rest of their lives. It is time to say forgive.”

Billy snapped, “I can’t forgive them bastards for what they done.”

For fifty days, the backhoes excavated, creating a crater the size of an Olympic swimming pool. The family’s sense of anticipation eventually gave way to despair: the I.R.A. had apparently been mistaken. “They made a laughingstock of us” when Jean was kidnapped, Agnes said, her mascara dissolving in tears. “They’re making another laughingstock of us now.” The search was called off, and the children returned to their homes. One of the men who had abducted Jean now drove a black taxi up and down the Falls Road. Occasionally, Michael hailed a cab and climbed inside only to discover this man behind the wheel. Michael

never said anything—he couldn’t. He rode in silence, then handed the man his fare.

One afternoon in March, 1973, a woman answered the telephone at the headquarters of the *London Times* and heard a man reciting, in a soft brogue, the descriptions and locations of several cars that were parked in the city. “The bombs will go off in one hour,” he said.

It was two o’clock. Officials at the *Times* reported the call to the police while several reporters headed toward the closest bomb, which, according to the caller, was inside a green Ford Cortina parked outside London’s Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey. By two-thirty, police had arrived on the scene. A hundred-and-twenty-pound bomb lay underneath the car’s back seat. They called in the bomb squad and burst into an adjacent pub, The George, ordering the startled patrons to evacuate. A school bus had just deposited forty-nine children not far from the Cortina, and an inspector shouted at the teachers to get them out of the area.

Plans for a coördinated bombing of central London had originated several months earlier, at a secret meeting in Belfast. The I.R.A. had planted hundreds of bombs in Northern Ireland, but Dolours Price, remembering her father’s bombing campaign in Britain during the forties, had argued for a bolder operation. In a 2012 interview with the *Telegraph*, she recalled, “I was convinced that a short, sharp shock, an incursion into the heart of the empire, would be more effective than twenty car bombs in any part of the north of Ireland.” Dolours attended the strategy meeting, along with her sister Marian and Brendan Hughes. According to both Dolours Price and Hughes, the meeting was run by Gerry Adams. Generally, the I.R.A. issued warnings before its bomb blasts, in order to minimize civilian casualties. But sometimes these warnings did not allow sufficient time for escape: in July, 1972, twenty bombs were detonated in a single day in Belfast, killing nine people, an episode that became known as Bloody Friday.

“This could be a hanging job,” Adams told the group, explaining that if the perpetrators were caught they could be



In 1972, Michael McConville witnessed his mother's abduction by I.R.A. members. He still sees some of the kidnappers around Belfast.

executed for treason. "If anyone doesn't want to go, they should up and leave now." Several people did so, but the Price sisters remained, and a team of ten was eventually selected to carry out the I.R.A.'s first bombing mission in England in thirty years. Although Dolours was only twenty-two, she was chosen to run the mission. She was, in her own words, the Officer Commanding "of the whole shebang." The team was sent into the Republic for several weeks of weapons training. Cars were stolen at gunpoint, in Belfast, then repainted and sent to Dublin, where they were

fitted with English license plates and shipped by ferry across the Irish Sea. Shortly before the day chosen for the attack, Price and her team filtered into London and checked into hotels.

The plan was to plant the bombs in four locations in the morning, with timers set to detonate simultaneously that afternoon. By 7:30 A.M., all four cars were in position. The bombs were set to blast at 2:50 P.M. By then, if everything went according to plan, the bombers would have caught a flight back to Ireland.

But, unbeknownst to Price and her

team, British authorities had an I.R.A. informer who had given them advance warning of the attack. Police had been instructed to be extra vigilant, and shortly after one of the bombs was planted, in a Ford Corsair outside Scotland Yard, a passing officer noticed that the number plate on the car did not match the year of the vehicle. Upon further inspection, police discovered the bomb in the back seat—and defused it. British officials, knowing that the bombers were likely trying to escape the country, issued an emergency directive: "Close England."

In the departures lounge at Heathrow

Airport, police spotted a group of young people waiting to board a flight to Dublin. A dark-haired woman in a long coat appeared to be giving orders. It was Dolours Price. When police questioned her, she told them that her name was Una Devlin. An officer showed her an early edition of the *Evening News*, with a banner headline about the bomb discovered at Scotland Yard. She stared at it silently. In her handbag, police found, along with "a large quantity of makeup," a spiral notebook with several pages ripped out. When experts examined the indentations on the pages underneath, they discovered traces of a diagram that depicted the circuitry of a timing device. Dolours was arrested, as was Marian Price; at the subsequent trial, the detective who interrogated Marian recalled that, at precisely 2:50 P.M., "she raised her wrist and looked very pointedly at her watch, and smiled at me."

Police explosives experts did not arrive at the Old Bailey until two-fifty, and could not defuse the bomb before it detonated. The blast shattered windows, blew a crater in the ground, and sent glass and twisted metal flying. A bomb in Westminster also went off. These two explosions injured more than two hundred people, and one man died of a heart attack. "There was no intention to kill people with the London bombs," Hughes remembered. Dolours Price was less apologetic. "There were warnings phoned in, but people had stood about," she said years later. "Some had even stood at office windows and been sprayed by broken glass when the car went up." She added, "In Belfast, we gave fifteen-minute warnings. In London, we'd given them an hour."

The trial of the Old Bailey bombers took place in Winchester Castle, outside London, and lasted ten weeks. It was a sensational event, with the press drawn especially to the Price sisters; the *Irish Times* described them showing up in court each day "sprucely dressed" and adopting defiant poses. On the stand, Dolours was almost smug, insisting that she knew nothing of the operation. When a prosecutor asked about the timing device depicted in her notebook, she feigned confusion, mugging for the spectators—"He lost me." Asked about her politics, she was less evasive, saying, "I would like to see the removal of the border and

STAR SYSTEM

The stars in their magnificent array
Look down upon the Earth, their cynosure,
Or so it seems. They are too far away,
In fact, to see a thing; hence they look pure
To us. They lack the textures of our globe,
So only we, from cameras carried high,
Enjoy the beauty of the swirling robe
That wraps us up, the interplay of sky
And cloud, as if a Wedgwood plate of blue
And white should melt, and then, its surface stirred
With spoons, a treasure too good to be true,
Be placed, and hover like a hummingbird,
Drawing all eyes, though ours alone, to feast
On splendor as it turns west from the East.

There was a time when some of our young men
Walked plumply on the moon and saw Earth rise,
As stunning as the sun. The years since then
Have aged them. Now and then somebody dies.
It's like a clock, for those of us who saw
The Saturn rockets going up as if
Mankind had energy to burn. The law

the establishment of a democratic Eire."

Eight bombers were convicted and received double life sentences. As the verdict was read aloud, they jeered at the judge, proclaiming their loyalty to the I.R.A. They also announced their intention to launch a hunger strike. As Padraig O'Malley points out in his 1990 book, "Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair," fasting as a form of protest had a history in Ireland dating back to pre-Christian times. In 1903, W.B. Yeats wrote a play, "The King's Threshold," about a poet in seventh-century Ireland who launches a hunger strike at the gates of the royal palace. Yeats describes: "An old and foolish custom, that if a man/Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve/Upon another's threshold till he die, / The common people, for all time to come, / Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold."

In 1920, Terence MacSwiney, an Irish politician who had been imprisoned in Brixton on charges of sedition, died after a seventy-three-day hunger strike. His case attracted international attention, and tens of thousands of people filed past his coffin after his death. "It is not those who inflict the most but

those who suffer the most who will conquer," MacSwiney had said.

When the Price sisters and several of their co-defendants began refusing food, they had clear demands. They wanted to be granted political-prisoner status and transferred to Northern Ireland so that they could serve their sentences closer to their families. "Each day passes and we fade a little more," Dolours wrote, in a letter. "But no matter how the body may fade, our determination never will." Most parents would panic at the thought of a daughter, barely out of her teens, announcing her intention to starve herself to death. But the Prices could situate this gesture within a proud tradition of dissent. Albert, after visiting his daughters, told the press, "They are happy. Happy about dying."

The British authorities, recognizing that they would face a crisis if one of the Price sisters perished, force-fed them daily. "Four male prison officers tie you into the chair so tightly with sheets you can't struggle," Marian later explained. "You clench your teeth to try to keep your mouth closed, but they push a metal spring device around your jaw to prize it open." Guards then inserted a wooden clamp with a hole in the middle, and

Is different for one man. Time is a cliff
You come to in the dark. Though you might fall
As easily as on a feather bed,
It is a sad farewell. You loved it all.
You dream that you might keep it in your head.
But memories, where can you take them to?
Take one last look at them. They end with you.

And still the Earth revolves, and still the blaze
Of stars maintains a show of vigilance.
It should, for long ago, in olden days,
We came from there. By luck, by fate, by chance,
All of the elements that form the world
Were sent by cataclysms deep in space,
And from their combination life unfurled
And stood up straight, and wore a human face.
I still can't pass a mirror. Like a boy,
I check my looks, and now I see the shell
Of what I was. So why, then, this strange joy?
Perhaps an old man dying would do well
To smile as he rejoins the cosmic dust
Life comes from, for resign himself he must.

—Clive James

slid a tube through the hole. “They throw whatever they like into the food mixer,” Marian continued. “Orange juice, soup, or cartons of cream if they want to beef up the calories.” By January, 1974, people who visited Dolours expressed horror at her physical deterioration: she had lost a great deal of weight, her skin had turned waxen, and her hair had gone white at the roots. Her teeth had come loose under pressure from the clamp.

It was an impossible situation for the British government, which began to be attacked for force-feeding the Prices, though the sisters were otherwise likely to die. The standoff took a bizarre turn when thieves stole the Vermeer painting “The Guitar Player” from a museum in Hampstead, and, in ransom notes, threatened to burn it—“with much carousing in the true lunatic fashion”—if the Price sisters were not moved to Northern Ireland. The Prices’ mother, Chrissie, told the press that Dolours, “who is an art student,” had pleaded that the Vermeer remain undamaged. (It was eventually returned, unharmed.)

In May, 1974, the British government, under increasing public pressure, agreed to stop force-feeding the Prices. The sisters began losing a pound a day and, ac-

cording to one medical assessment, were “living entirely off their own bodies.” Finally, Roy Jenkins, the British Home Secretary, assured the Prices that they could eventually be moved to Armagh prison, in Northern Ireland. That June, after two hundred and five days, they abandoned the strike. A transfer was secretly approved the following spring.

In a 2002 radio documentary, “The Chaplain’s Diary,” Dolours recalls that the governor of Brixton prison walked into her cell and said, “You’re going home. Or, not home—you’re going to Armagh.”

“That’s near enough for me,” Dolours replied. She sat next to Marian on the short flight across the Irish Sea, and, at the first glimpse of green below, burst into tears.

“That’s not Ireland yet,” Marian said. “That’s the Isle of Man.”

Within an hour, they had landed in Northern Ireland. The Price sisters were overjoyed to be home but distressed about the timing of their arrival. In the preceding months, both their mother, Chrissie, and their aunt Bridie Dolan had died. The sisters had unsuccessfully petitioned for compassionate release to attend their mother’s funeral. Chrissie

Price’s casket was carried through the streets of Belfast. The piper leading the procession was a young girl dressed in the black beret and dark glasses of the I.R.A.

In “On the Blanket,” a history of hunger strikes during the Troubles, Tim Pat Coogan notes that the decision to stop force-feeding the Prices had profound consequences, because the British government was effectively signalling that “henceforth any prisoner on hunger strike would be allowed to die.” In 1981, the hunger striker Bobby Sands did die, followed by nine other prisoners. As he lay dying, Sands engaged in a fateful stunt: he ran for a seat in the British Parliament, representing Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and he won.

During the seventies, Gerry Adams was in and out of jail. In addition to his 1972 internment on the Maidstone, he was confined for three years in Long Kesh prison, where he shared a cell with Brendan Hughes. At some point, Adams began to think that there were limits to what the I.R.A. could achieve through violence. After Sands won his seat, Adams’s close aide Danny Morrison announced that Sinn Fein would henceforth run candidates in elections. In a famous formulation, he said, “Will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?” The strategy of “the Armalite and the ballot box” represented a departure for the Provisional I.R.A.: by running for positions in the British administration in Northern Ireland, Adams and his colleagues could be perceived as implicitly acknowledging the administration’s legitimacy. Adams replaced the woolly sweaters of a West Belfast revolutionary with the suits and ties of a politician. In 1983, he, too, was elected a Member of Parliament, representing West Belfast.

Dolours Price spent six years in Armagh. Although she and Marian were no longer refusing food, they continued to deteriorate physically. In the 2002 radio documentary, Dolours explained the psychology of a hunger striker: “If you eat, you’re going to lose. You convince yourself of that when you embark on a hunger strike. You *have* to convince yourself, because your body is telling you it wants food, and you’re telling your body, ‘No, you can’t have

food. . . . We will not win this struggle if I give you food.’’ After the Price sisters forced the British government to bend to their aims, they found it difficult to overcome the profound resistance they had developed to eating. ‘‘We both ended up with very, very, very distorted notions of the function of food,’’ Dolours said.

By the spring of 1980, Marian had lost so much weight that she was released from prison, after Humphrey Atkins, Britain’s Northern Secretary, judged her ‘‘in imminent danger of death.’’ Dolours was relieved that her sister had escaped a life sentence, but she felt abandoned. ‘‘I got really depressed,’’ she said later. ‘‘It was like I’d been separated from my Siamese twin.’’ In a letter, she described the crushing inertia of her days, her energy depleted, her body numb: ‘‘I move as a clockwork doll.’’

A cache of papers recently declassified by the British government reveals that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was closely watching the case of Dolours Price. Initially, Thatcher was unmoved. In one memo, she speculated that Price would rejoin the I.R.A.—‘‘I doubt whether her old friends will let her alone when she is out’’—and reminded her subordinates that the London bombing had caused a man’s death. (According to an autopsy, the heart attack that killed the man had actually begun before the bomb detonated.) In April, 1981, Tomas O Fiaich, an Irish cardinal, visited Price in Armagh, and reported to Thatcher. ‘‘From being a vivacious girl . . . she has become, at thirty, a gaunt spectre, prematurely aged and deprived of any further desire to live,’’ he wrote. He begged Thatcher for clemency, stressing that ‘‘even next week may be too late.’’ When Price entered Armagh, in 1975, her weight was a hundred and fourteen pounds. By the time the cardinal saw her, she weighed seventy-six pounds. Thatcher authorized her release.

Dolours Price did not rejoin the I.R.A. Instead, she moved to Dublin, where she avoided publicity and tried to establish a career as a freelance journalist. She began dating the actor Stephen Rea, whom she had met during the civil-rights protests of the sixties. Rea was a brooding, shaggy-haired Belfast Protestant who was sympathetic to the Republican cause. In 1980, he had

helped establish Field Day, an Irish theatre troupe. Rea and Price were married at Armagh Cathedral in 1983. When asked about being married to a convicted terrorist, he would say, ‘‘That’s my wife’s past. . . . She doesn’t apologize for that, and I’m not going to apologize for her.’’

Rea never had a formal relationship with the Republican movement, but he did have a bizarre connection to Gerry Adams. After a series of I.R.A. bombings in the late eighties, the Thatcher government announced a bafflingly misguided policy, which held that, on British television, the voice of anyone believed to be advocating paramilitary action must be muted. Actors were hired to dub interviews and speeches, and for years a small stable of Irish actors found occasional employment as the voice of Gerry Adams. One of the actors was Rea.

The terms of Dolours Price’s release held that she must obtain permission from the British government if she wanted to leave Northern Ireland. But, her defiance unchecked, she proceeded to move with Rea to London. According to friends, Price relished the cheekiness of this relocation. England’s tabloids did as well, noting that the bomber of the Old Bailey was now ‘‘sipping champagne with stars at the National Theatre,’’ where Rea was directing a play. Price’s effrontery was brought to the attention of Thatcher, and she made

released ‘‘The Crying Game,’’ in which Rea played the role for which he is perhaps most famous: Fergus, a decent and soulful man who happens to be a member of the I.R.A. In the story, Fergus is assigned to guard a kidnapped British soldier (played by Forest Whitaker) in the hours before his execution. They stay up all night, and Fergus develops a friendship with the soldier, hand-feeding him pieces of chocolate and comforting him when he cries, before taking him outside to be shot. While promoting the film, Rea said little about the fact that his wife had once occupied a similar role, guarding prisoners at gunpoint or driving them to their deaths. But in one later interview he discussed what it meant to be a member of the I.R.A., and described the ‘‘conundrum of people whose lives are a gesture.’’ Such people, Rea said, are often ‘‘not afraid of death, because your death is acceptable if you’re living for a cause.’’

Belfast has ostensibly been at peace for two decades, but the city remains acutely divided. The borders between Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods are inscribed in the concertina wire and steel of the so-called ‘‘peace walls’’ that progress like fissures across the city. These towering structures maintain some degree of calm by physically separating the city’s populations, as if they were animals in a zoo. The walls are tagged with runelike slurs—K.A.T., for ‘‘Kill All Taigs,’’ a derogatory term for Catholics, on one side; K.A.H., for ‘‘Kill All Huns,’’ a reference to Protestants, on the other—and dwarf the squat brick houses and the unlovely council estates on either side, throwing them into shadow.

In one sense, the Troubles are over. The principal armed factions have long since decommissioned their weapons, and in most parts of Belfast it is safe to walk the streets. The city center is dominated by the same chain stores—Tesco, Caffè Nero, Kiehl’s—found in the other urban centers of Western Europe, and most residents will tell you that they want Belfast to become famous for something other than conflict. Several people informed me, with pride, that the local film-production facility, Titanic Studios, is where ‘‘Game of Thrones’’ is shot. One popular tourist



no secret of her frustration. ‘‘If she and her husband wish to live together, they can live together in Northern Ireland,’’ she wrote. But no action was taken against the couple.

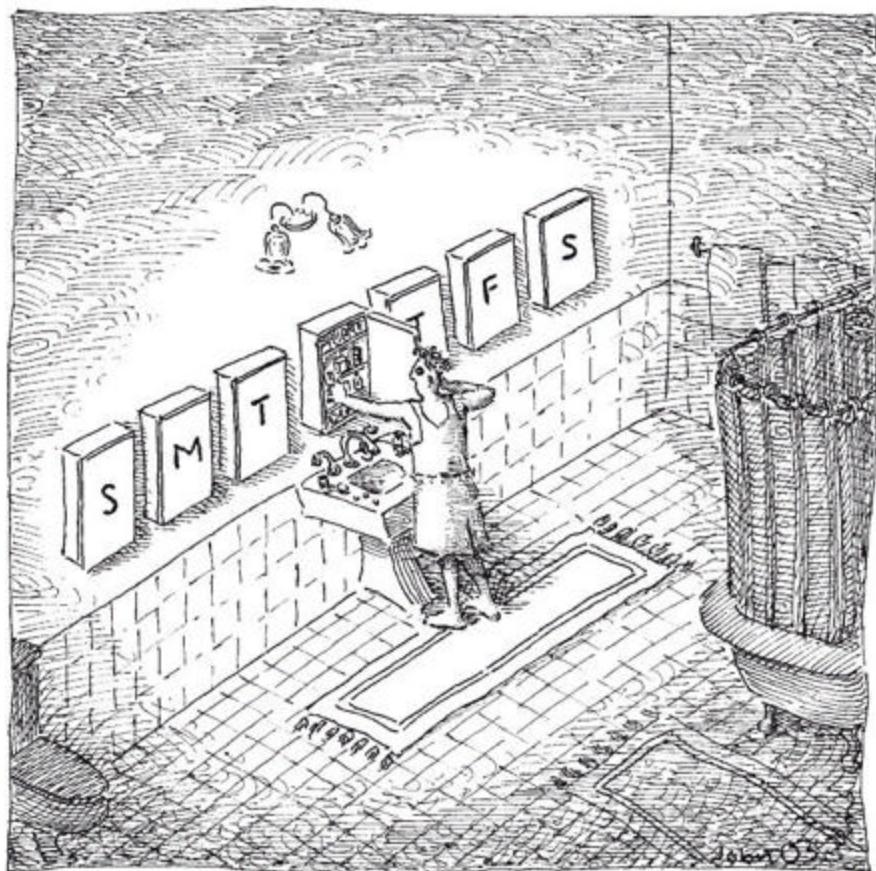
Eventually, Price and Rea had two boys, Danny and Oscar, and the family moved back to Dublin. (In interviews, Rea said that he did not want to bring up his sons in England.) One of Rea’s closest collaborators was the Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan, and in 1992 they

attraction is the Troubles Tour, in which ex-combatant cabdrivers guide visitors to flashpoints from the bad years, decoding the ubiquitous murals that conjure famous battles, martyrs, and gunmen. The effect is to make the Troubles seem like distant history.

But there are at least as many peace walls in Belfast today as there were at the time of the Good Friday Agreement. Residents still live in neighborhoods circumscribed by religion, and ninety-three per cent of children in Northern Ireland attend segregated elementary schools. Bus stops in some parts of the city are informally designated Catholic or Protestant, and people walk an extra block or two to wait at a stop where they won't fear being hassled. I arrived in August, just after "marching season," when Unionists commemorate the Battle of the Boyne and other bygone victories by lighting bonfires and staging belligerent marches. Hundreds of Union Jacks still fluttered in Protestant neighborhoods. Catholic areas were decked out with the Irish tricolor, and with Palestinian flags—a sign of solidarity and a signal that, even now, many Republicans in the north consider themselves an occupied people.

Two years ago, Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, chaired a series of multiparty negotiations about unresolved issues in the Northern Ireland peace process; the talks foundered, in no small measure, over the issue of flags. Tribalism and its trappings remain so potent in Belfast, Haass told me, that the various sides could not agree on how to govern the display of regalia. When the Belfast city council voted, in 2012, to limit the number of days that the Union Jack could be raised outside city hall, protesters tried to storm the building, and riots erupted throughout Northern Ireland, with Unionist demonstrators throwing bricks and petrol bombs.

To an outsider, the sheer weirdness, and attendant inconvenience, of living in a divided metropolis can be difficult to fathom. When I was driving through Belfast with Michael McConville, we reached a street that threaded between a Catholic neighborhood on the left and a Protestant one on the right. I noticed a Subway franchise along a strip of businesses on the Catholic side, and



asked if local Protestants might cross the street to buy a sandwich.

"Not a chance," Michael replied.

One morning, I visited Billy McKee, one of the founders of the Provisional I.R.A., in a small brick house in West Belfast. Born in 1921, five years after the Easter Rising, he joined the I.R.A. in the thirties, acquiring a reputation as a formidable combatant. When Brendan Hughes was a boy, the reverence in his family for Billy McKee was so deep that he felt he should "genuflect" every time he passed McKee's house. McKee was said to be armed at all times, and on one occasion, in a back room after a funeral, Hughes contrived to brush up against him and felt a .45 concealed beneath his belt.

McKee came to the door dressed in a dark suit, having just returned from Mass. His hair was white and spiky, in the style of Samuel Beckett. As a clock ticked loudly in another room, I asked about the disappearance of Jean McConville. McKee said that he played no role in the decision to kill her. He was in prison in 1972, and was ceding con-

trol of the I.R.A. to other leaders. But he insisted that killing McConville was the right thing to do, because she was a tout. "I would have had her executed and left her there," he said, with a level gaze. "I couldn't understand why they took her away to disappear her."

When I told him that I was curious about the people who were responsible for that decision, McKee scowled, worrying his dentures with his tongue, so that they slid from one side to the other. "What would happen if I knew and I told you, and they all got arrested?" McKee said. "I would be the axe man. I wouldn't like to put my enemies in jail, never mind some of my friends."

I expressed surprise that, in a city like Belfast, where everybody knows everybody else, it was so difficult to solve a notorious murder. "I don't think anybody's stupid enough to mention names," McKee said. Then he muttered, "Too dangerous." He shuffled with me to the door, and said, "If you see any of my old friends, tell 'em I'm still breathing."

If McKee is an unreconstructed militant who speaks without equivocation

about the role that he played in the armed struggle, Gerry Adams has in recent decades gone through a metamorphosis. As the peace process got under way, during the nineties, Adams continued the transformation of his public persona from international pariah to statesman and champion of peace. Today, he is a Member of the Irish Parliament, representing County Louth, and Sinn Fein is an ascendant political party both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. Adams is widely credited, even by his detractors, with having played an instrumental role in ending the Troubles. Yet he still maintains that he was never a member of the I.R.A. “Everybody knows he was in the I.R.A., except for Gerry,” Michael McConville said. At the height of the Troubles, there was an obvious motive to deny the affiliation: a charge of “membership” in the I.R.A. was enough to send you to prison. With the advent of peace negotiations, there was a further incentive for Adams to distance himself from his armed comrades—British officials could deal with him and not risk charges that they were negotiating with a terrorist. But if Adams initially crafted a fiction out of

political expediency, he chose to stick with it, even after some of his closest collaborators unburdened themselves. In 2001, Martin McGuinness, the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, admitted publicly that, in the early seventies, he had been the second-highest-ranking member of the I.R.A. in Derry. This acknowledgment does not appear to have hurt his political career; McGuinness has won three elections since 2001.

Adams is now sixty-six and a grandfather, and his evolution into an approachable grandee has found its surreal culmination on Twitter. He intersperses studiously boring tweets about small-bore political issues with a barrage of cat pictures and encomiums to sudsy baths, rubber duckies, and Teddy bears. (“I do love Teddy bears,” he told the BBC. “I have a large collection of Teddy bears.”) One characteristic tweet, from last January: “Dreamt I was eating Cream Eggs. Woke up this morn. Pillow & beard covered in chocolate & cream thingyebob.” The Irish writer Damien Owens has likened all this to “Charles Manson showing you his collection of tea cosies.” But, cumulatively, Adams’s tweets sug-

gest the giddiness of a man who has defied some very long odds. In 1984, Adams told a reporter that he had a ninety-per-cent chance of being assassinated. Later that year, he was shot and nearly killed by loyalist gunmen, and during periods of captivity he was tortured by British authorities. Improbably, Adams survived the conflict—and, more improbably, he flourished.

The new Gerry Adams never completely eclipsed the old one, however, and this may have been a conscious choice. The journalist Fintan O’Toole once observed that the ambiguity of the Adams persona was essential to the peace process: in order to participate in the negotiations, Adams had to be accepted as a democratic politician; but, in order to deliver the desired result, he needed to exercise enough control over I.R.A. gunmen so that if he ordered them to lay down their weapons they would comply. Perhaps in the interest of preserving this flexibility, Adams perfected a dog-whistle style of political rhetoric. Asked about his role in the armed conflict, he has said, “I’m very, very clear about my denial of I.R.A. membership. But I don’t disassociate myself from the I.R.A.” Adams is beholden to multiple constituencies, and for some faction of supporters his charisma has always derived, at least in part, from the whiff of cordite. At a public event in Belfast in 1995, Adams was delivering a speech when someone shouted, “Bring back the I.R.A.!” Adams responded, “They haven’t gone away, you know.”

Traditionally, Irish journalists have shown surprising deference to Adams’s sophistry about his role in the armed struggle. To be sure, Adams has never been convicted of a violent crime, or of any I.R.A.-related offenses. But as a young man he often published essays in a Republican newsletter, under a pseudonym, and in 1976 he wrote, “Rightly or wrongly, I am an I.R.A. volunteer.” Even so, most press accounts simply recycled his denials, and, because the I.R.A. was so disciplined, none of his comrades spoke out to contradict him.

During the peace process, however, many rank-and-file members of the I.R.A. felt surprised and betrayed when Adams accepted the legitimacy of a government in Northern Ireland that remained part of the United Kingdom.



“Well, he didn’t get that kind of language from me!”

Many also questioned his willingness to surrender the weapons they had amassed. Some former volunteers became so disillusioned by Adams's concessions that they broke the code of silence and told their stories to the press.

In 2001, Ed Moloney, a veteran reporter for the *Irish Times* and other newspapers, published a landmark revisionist account, "A Secret History of the IRA," which stated explicitly that Gerry Adams had been a military commander responsible for the Belfast Brigade. Adams and Moloney had known each other for decades, and had enjoyed a cordial relationship during the Troubles, meeting occasionally in a back room on the Falls Road; Adams would make a pot of tea and Moloney would interview him. Once, after a long session in Moloney's hotel room, Adams stayed and slept on the floor. But their relations had grown strained by the time "The Secret History of the IRA" was published, and Adams accused Moloney of "innuendo," declaring, "I have not been and am not a member of the I.R.A."

As Moloney was preparing the book for publication, he was approached by administrators at Boston College about creating an oral-history project that would gather accounts by paramilitaries from both sides of the Troubles. The idea excited him. Many of the combatants were still alive, and their testimony could provide an unparalleled resource for future historians—an exception to the rule of omertà. Given the sensitivities, Moloney pointed out, each interview would have to be conducted in secret, and remain secret until the participant died. "These people could be shot if it was discovered they were talking to us," he told me. "They were taking a huge risk."

The Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland were too insular and suspicious for graduate students with tape recorders to make headway, so Moloney suggested an unorthodox solution: finding interviewers who had participated in the Troubles. For the Unionists, Moloney suggested a loyalist named Wilson McArthur; for the Republicans, he proposed a former I.R.A. volunteer named Anthony McIntyre, who had spent seventeen years in

prison for the murder of a U.V.F. man. McIntyre, who was Moloney's friend and source, had obtained a college degree in prison, and had gone on to write a dissertation on the Troubles at Queen's University in Belfast. He had a gruff, genial manner, and was at ease with retired revolutionaries, which suggested that they might open up to him, on tape, about secrets they had kept for decades. They did. "It was cathartic," a former I.R.A. member named Richard O'Rawe said of his interview with McIntyre. "I cried like a baby."

This clandestine undertaking became known, to the people who were aware of it, as the Belfast Project. One of McIntyre's subjects was the man still widely known around Belfast as the Dark: Brendan Hughes. They were close, having served together in prison. When I visited McIntyre and his wife, Carrie, at their home, in Drogheda, a small city between Dublin and Belfast, they showed me photographs of Hughes giving Carrie away at their wedding. McIntyre and Hughes shared a deep antipathy toward Gerry Adams. McIntyre disapproved of Adams's engineering of the Good Friday Agreement, and his interview questions reflected this animosity. But Hughes required no prodding to express anger at Adams. He and Adams had been close collaborators for years, but when Adams proved willing to compromise on the question of a united Ireland, in the interest of a peace deal, Hughes was incensed: Adams had been his Officer Commanding, the man who gave him orders to kill. Adams's denial of his own I.R.A. past left Hughes and others "to carry the responsibility of all those deaths." Everybody knows that Adams was in the I.R.A., Hughes told McIntyre. "The British know it. The people on the street know it. The dogs know it."

Terry Hughes, Brendan's brother, told me that Brendan felt that he had been unforgivably misled. He had been fighting a bloody war against British rule while Adams was quietly laying the foundation for a peaceful compromise. "There was a master plan," Terry said. "Unfortunately, Brendan wasn't told."

Hughes confided to McIntyre that he felt like "a patsy," and insisted that he had "never carried out a major operation without the O.K. or the order

from Gerry." Adams, in the 1976 essay referring to his membership in the I.R.A., wrote about the moral decision to use violence, maintaining that "only if I achieve the situation where my people genuinely prosper can my course of action be seen ... to have been justified." The Good Friday Agreement did not deliver the ends that Hughes and others had counted on to justify the I.R.A.'s brutal means. Adams's political turn forced his subordinates to reappraise the righteousness of their own killing.

Divis Flats was demolished in the nineteen-nineties, except for the tower where the British had their observation post. In the years after the Good Friday Agreement, Brendan Hughes lived alone in an apartment at the top of the tower. Demoralized by the things he had done, he spent his days chain-smoking by a picture window, looking out over Belfast, past the peace walls and church steeples to the shipworks where, a century earlier, the Titanic was built. "I always got the sense that he lived a large part of his life on that windowsill," Carrie McIntyre said. "And he couldn't either jump out and end it all or jump back in and start really living."

The Divis apartment is where McIntyre interviewed Hughes about the killing of Jean McConville. "She was an informer," Hughes said. "She had a load of kids." Hughes told McIntyre that McConville's children had been acting as spies for the British Army, "gathering information for her, watching the movements of I.R.A. volunteers around Divis Flats." She was exposed, Hughes continued, when a radio transmitter was discovered in her flat. According to Hughes, the I.R.A. learned of the transmitter when one of the McConville children mentioned to one of Hughes's men that "his mammy had something in the house."

Hughes sent his men to confront McConville, and they took her away for interrogation. According to Hughes, she confessed to being a tout. The I.R.A. confiscated the transmitter and released her onto the streets. This could align with the night when Jean McConville was taken from the bingo parlor, but when I asked Michael McConville about the transmitter he told me that Hughes must be mistaken—because no such transmitter existed. He and his siblings

knew every nook of their apartment; if Jean had hidden such a device on the premises, he would have found it. Michael also dismissed the idea that he and his siblings had been spies. In the oral history, Hughes says that, a few weeks after McConville's interrogation, "another transmitter was put into her house and she was still coöperating with the British." At this point, a decision was made to kill her, and a "special squad was brought in" to carry out the operation.

"There was only one man who gave the order for that woman to be executed," Hughes told McIntyre. "That fucking man is now the head of Sinn Fein." At the time, he continued, a senior I.R.A. official named Ivor Bell argued that they should leave McConville's body on the street, just as Billy McKee would have done. But, according to Hughes, McConville's gender would have generated bad publicity for the Provisional I.R.A., and so Adams pushed to disappear her. Recalling Adams's subsequent meetings with the McConville children, Hughes said, "He went to this family's house and promised an investigation into the woman's disappearance. . . . The man that gave the fucking order for that woman to be executed! Now, tell me the morality in that."

Hughes fell into a coma in 2008. Gerry Adams visited the hospital and sat, in silent vigil, by his bed. The two men had not spoken in years. Hughes had told friends, "There was a time in my life when I would have taken a bullet for Gerry. Now I'd put one in him." When Hughes died, his casket was paraded through West Belfast, and thousands of people turned out, in frigid temperatures, to pay their respects. At one point, a figure in a dark overcoat shouldered through the crowd: Adams. He solemnly insinuated himself among the men bearing the coffin. "Brendan was a Republican icon," Terry Hughes told me. "Gerry had no choice. He had to associate himself with that."

Dolours Price also attended the procession. She, too, had split with Adams, and she wrote a scathing open letter, deriding him as a "lonely figure" who was "clearly uneasy" at the funeral of his former friend. If Adams could come clean about his past in the I.R.A., Price suggested, he might "feel better." She

noted that Adams had a habit of wrapping himself in the mantle of people who were no longer alive to snatch it back. At one point, Adams suggested that, had Bobby Sands survived, Sands would have supported the peace process. In an article, Price replied, acidly, "I often wonder who would speak for me had my circumstances in Brixton prison reached their expected conclusion. What praises would I be singing of the Good Friday Agreement?"

Price also recorded an oral history for the Belfast Project. When her life was a gesture—a headlong push for a united Ireland—it possessed a certain moral logic. But the Good Friday Agreement robbed her of that certainty. "Dolours was a woman who was deeply traumatized by what she had done," McIntyre told me. Like many people who were drawn to the I.R.A., she saw herself as a member of the left, yet she had participated in forced disappearances—an atrocity, McIntyre pointed out, that is the "calling card of the war criminal, whether it's in Chile or Kampuchea."

In February, 2001, Price attended an I.R.A. event to commemorate the death of a hunger striker, and announced, in an impromptu speech, "Gerry Adams was my commanding officer." She added that she had not endured "the pangs of hunger strike just for a reformed English rule in Ireland." Shortly thereafter, McIntyre visited Price's home, in the seaside town of Malahide, outside Dublin, where, surrounded by memorabilia from her I.R.A. days, they conducted a series of interviews. Price spoke about her role in the disappearances and, in particular, about her grief over the death of Joe Lynskey, a close friend of hers. Lynskey, who was known as the Monk—because he had trained for the Cistercian order before joining the armed struggle—was a brigade intelligence officer and an ardent believer in the mission of the Provisional I.R.A.

In 1972, it emerged that he had been having an affair with the wife of another I.R.A. man, and had tried to have the man killed. The I.R.A. secretly sentenced Lynskey to death, and Price was told to drive him across the border to his execution. She picked him up at his sister's house, on the pretext that he was being called to a meeting in the Re-

public. Lynskey walked out with a little overnight bag, as though he were leaving for a weekend in the country. As they drove south in silence, Price realized that Lynskey knew where they were going. He was a large man: he could have overpowered her. Instead, he sat there, meekly, with his bag in his lap. "She wanted him to get up and escape," McIntyre recalled. When she handed him over, in County Monaghan, "Lynskey hugged her and told her not to worry." His body has never been recovered.

Price informed McIntyre, before one of their recording sessions, that she wanted to go on the record about the role that she had played in the disappearance of Jean McConville. By this point, Price and McIntyre were good friends; she later became godmother to his son. "As a historian, I would love to get this," McIntyre told her. "As your friend, I have to warn you. You have children. If you commit to being involved in the McConville disappearance, your children will bear the mark of Cain."

When I asked McIntyre whether Price said anything about Jean McConville on her recording, he chuckled ruefully, then shook his head. "I was disappointed," he said. "She took my advice."

One day in the summer of 2003, a man walking on Shelling Hill Beach, near Carlingford, noticed a piece of fabric in the sand. He reached down to examine it and felt something hard: a human bone. When the authorities exhumed the remains, they found the skeleton of a middle-aged woman, still in her clothes. A forensic examination concluded that the cause of death was a "gunshot wound to the head."

At a nearby morgue, the children of Jean McConville were ushered into a room, one by one, so that they could examine the clothing, which was laid out on a table. Archie went in first, but he couldn't bear to look. Instead, he asked a question: "Is there a nappy pin?"

A police officer surveyed the garments and said no. Then he folded over a corner of fabric—and there it was. Thirty-one years after Jean McConville vanished, her body was found. She was buried in November, 2003. The streets



Archie and Susan McConville tending to Jean McConville's grave, at Holy Trinity Cemetery, outside Belfast.

of West Belfast were typically crowded with kids on bikes and people lounging in front of their homes. Someone who attended the funeral told me that, when the procession passed through, everything was eerily quiet, as if the locals had been told to stay away—as if they were shunning the McConvilles once again.

In an effort to challenge the allegation that Jean McConville was a tout, her children made a formal request to Baroness Nuala O'Loan, the police ombudsman for Northern Ireland, to launch an inquiry into the case. Normally, Brit-

ish authorities would neither confirm nor deny whether an individual had worked for them as an informer, but O'Loan found that “the circumstances of the McConville family are most exceptional.” After consulting the files of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British military, O'Loan produced an official report, in 2006, which held that McConville “is not recorded as having been an agent at any time.” In O'Loan's judgment, McConville “was an innocent woman who was abducted and murdered.”

At the time that the O'Loan report

was released, the oral-history project at Boston College was a secret. But Price had been showing signs of increasing anxiety. In 2001, police raided her home and discovered several stolen prescription pads, an indication that she had been abusing prescription drugs. Her marriage to Stephen Rea ended in divorce, and her behavior became erratic. She showed up drunk at Maghaberry Prison and demanded to visit a hunger-striking inmate. She was accused of stealing a bottle of vodka from a supermarket. (In court, she blamed a “momentary lapse of concentration,” adding, with a

flash of her old pride, that it was not in her “temperament or breeding” to shop-lift.) Price began receiving treatment at a mental-health facility in Dublin.

“One of the most remarkable aspects of the Troubles was that, with a few exceptions, the people that I know who did these terrible things were all perfectly normal people,” Ed Moloney told me. “This wasn’t some band of robbers who were thieving and raping for personal profit. This was war. They were all nice killers. I felt pity for them. They were victims of circumstances beyond their control.” Sometimes Price felt agonizing remorse for the lives she had ruined; on other days, she was defiant, even about McConville, insisting that the death sentence was appropriate for an informer in wartime. But, whatever her feelings of contrition, Price seemed intent on at least acknowledging her past acts.

On February 21, 2010, the Belfast tabloid *Sunday Life* published a story linking Price to the disappearance of McConville. “In a taped confession, Old Bailey Bomber Dolours Price has admitted driving the mum-of-10 to her death,” the article reported, adding that Price claimed that the disappearance was “master-minded” by Gerry Adams. The paper quoted Michael McConville’s sister Helen calling for the arrest of Price and Adams. “It’s disgusting that the people involved in my mother’s murder are still walking the streets,” she said. “Adams and Price might not have pulled the trigger, but they are as guilty as the people who did.”

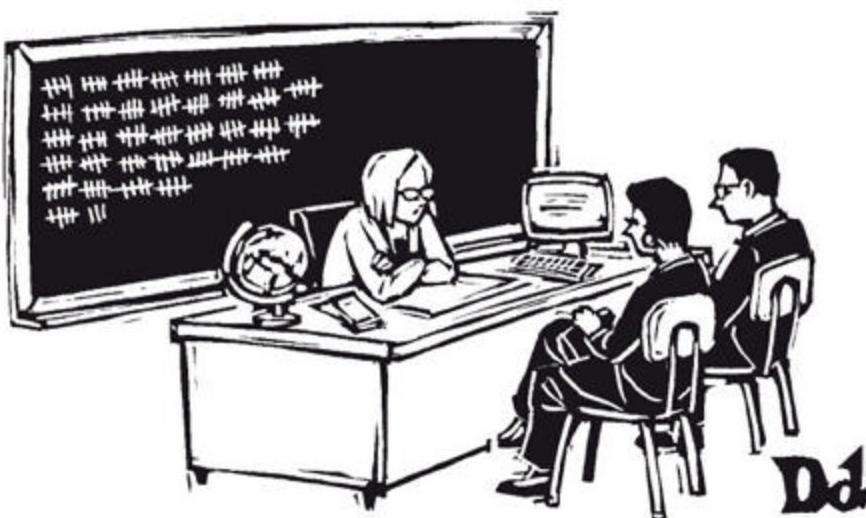
Adams issued an angry denial, observing that Price was “a long-standing opponent of Sinn Fein and the peace process,” and that she “clearly has her own issues to resolve.” But it was unclear whether Price had made this inflammatory disclosure directly to *Sunday Life*. The article’s author, Ciaran Barnes, wrote that he had listened to Price’s taped “confession” but did not say explicitly that she had made these disclosures to him. Instead, he asserted that Price had “made taped confessions of her role in the abductions to academics at Boston University.”

By this time, the Boston College archive was no longer a secret. After the death of Brendan Hughes and of David Ervine, another participant in the oral-history project, Ed Moloney had written a book, “Voices from the Grave,” which was soon to be published. But the *Sunday Life* article contained the first public suggestion that Price had given an interview to Boston College. Moloney and McIntyre are both adamant that the tabloid was not given access to Price’s recording, and point to the mistaken reference to “Boston University” as proof. They also note that, in Price’s interview with Anthony McIntyre, she never speaks of Jean McConville. Moloney thinks that *Sunday Life* likely obtained a recording of an interview that Price had given to the *Irish News*, and that the mention of the oral-history project was a clumsy effort to launder the interview’s provenance. (Allison Morris, the journalist who in-

terviewed Price for the *Irish News*, strongly denied this claim, saying, “The interview never left my office.” Ciaran Barnes said only that it would be “remiss of me to talk about my sources.”)

In March, 2011, the British government contacted the U.S. Department of Justice and explained that a criminal investigation had been initiated into McConville’s murder. Investigators at the Police Service of Northern Ireland wanted to consult the oral histories of Brendan Hughes and Dolours Price. If the I.R.A. had found McConville’s body, her case would have been covered by the immunity clause. But, because her remains were discovered by a civilian, the authorities were free to investigate—and bring charges. A subpoena was issued to Boston College, and in a legal filing the U.S. Attorney in Massachusetts declared, erroneously, that a *Sunday Life* reporter had been “permitted to listen to portions of Ms. Price’s Boston College interviews.” Moloney and McIntyre panicked. Turning over the interviews would not only violate the college’s promise to withhold an oral history until the subject’s death; it would also set a dangerous precedent. In an e-mail to administrators in Boston, Moloney wrote, “I would bet the mortgage that at this moment, there are teams of lawyers working in the bowels of the British government trying to discover ways to force B.C. to surrender the names of other possible interviewees.” The police simply could have asked *Sunday Life* for the recording, Moloney pointed out to me. In his view, they went after the Boston College archive because “they wanted to get the entire trove, for intelligence purposes.”

Moloney argued that there was a political aspect to the investigation. The police in Northern Ireland had made no serious effort to solve the McConville case until the notion arose that doing so might implicate Gerry Adams. Many police officers in Northern Ireland were former members of Special Branch and the Royal Ulster Constabulary—and for these men and women Adams was an arch antagonist. “At least in the back of their minds, there was the knowledge that we could get that fucker,” Moloney said. “All roads in that story were going to end at his door.” Tellingly, the British authorities hadn’t



“That’s not a math lesson. That’s just some notes to myself.”

launched a broad-based inquiry into past atrocities on all sides; indeed, many appalling crimes committed by Unionist paramilitaries—and by state authorities—have not been investigated to this day. “They’re not digging up all the bodies,” Moloney said. “They’re being very selective.”

In August, 2011, a second subpoena was issued, seeking any interview in the archive that contained “information about the abduction and death of Mrs. Jean McConville.” A federal judge in Massachusetts ordered Boston College to hand over the material to the British government. John Kerry, who was then the chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, appealed to Attorney General Eric Holder and to Hillary Clinton, who was then Secretary of State, to push for the subpoenas to be withdrawn. He cited concerns about “the continued success of the Northern Ireland peace process.” Moloney and McIntyre fought the issue on appeal, eventually receiving a stay from the U.S. Supreme Court. But the Court declined to hear the case, and in September, 2013, Boston College turned eleven interviews over to authorities in Belfast.

Last April, Adams reported to a police station in Antrim and was arrested for questioning in connection with the death of McConville. After surrendering his belt, tie, comb, and watch, he was interrogated for four days. He proclaimed his innocence, blaming a “malicious, untruthful, and sinister campaign” against him. He also raised a concern about the timing of his arrest: Sinn Fein was involved in simultaneous campaigns for seats in the European Union and in local government elections. “Both Moloney and McIntyre are opponents of the Sinn Fein leadership and our strategy,” Adams said at a press conference after his release. He has characterized the Belfast Project as “an entirely bogus, shoddy, and self-serving effort.”

At the press conference, Adams said that “the I.R.A. is gone—it’s finished.” But, during a Sinn Fein rally to protest his arrest, Bobby Storey—a close friend of his and a longtime Party operative with a thuggish reputation—alleged that there were sinister motives behind the investigation. Midway through the speech, Storey declared, “We haven’t



gone away, you know.” During my time in Belfast, half a dozen people quoted that line to me, noting the presumably deliberate echo of Adams’s famous 1995 quote about the I.R.A. Storey “didn’t mean Sinn Fein hadn’t gone away,” McIntyre said. “He meant the I.R.A.” To Michael McConville, the message was clear: even after peace and decommissioning, the I.R.A. would brook no challenge to its leader. “It still rules by threats,” he said.

By the time Adams was arrested, Dolours Price was dead. One day in January of 2013, one of her sons came home and discovered her in bed. “She wasn’t breathing,” he later told an inquest. Price had been drinking for several days, and had briefly been admitted to the hospital after falling down a flight of stairs. A medical examination found that she had died of a toxic combination of sedatives and antidepressants. Suicide was ruled out, but, when I asked Anthony and Carrie McIntyre if Price killed herself, Carrie said, “I believe it.”

“I’ve never formed a firm conclusion,” Anthony said.

“Brendan, too,” Carrie continued. “They committed suicide for years.”

In Hughes’s oral history, he spoke

to McIntyre about having been a hunger striker in prison. “The body is a fantastic machine,” he said. “It’ll eat off all the fat tissue first, and then it’ll eat the muscle, to keep your brain alive.” Long after Hughes and Price called an end to their strikes and attempted to reintegrate into society, they nursed old grudges and endlessly replayed their worst wartime abominations. They never stopped devouring themselves. In the coroner’s report for Dolours Price, the official pronouncement was “death by misadventure.”

The police did not charge Adams in the murder of McConville, and the investigation did not set back Sinn Fein: the Party did surprisingly well in the 2014 elections, winning more seats than expected. Today, it is the most popular political party in Ireland. According to polls, half the voters in Sinn Fein do not believe Adams’s claims about never having been a member of the I.R.A., but they do not appear to care. The beach where Jean McConville’s body was found is in Louth, Adams’s constituency in the Republic, yet Adams seems likely to retain the seat for as long as he wants it. In most countries, merely being implicated in a murder would be



"Please—no technology questions!"

enough to derail a political career. But Adams has a knack for weathering scandals. During a trial in 2013, it was revealed that his brother Liam was a pedophile who had molested his own daughter, and that Adams had known but done little to intervene; last October, a woman named Maria Cahill alleged that she had been raped, as a teenager, by an I.R.A. man, and that Adams had failed to discipline the rapist. "I don't know what the Irish word for Teflon is," Richard Haass told me. "But he has it."

In November, Adams flew to New York to give a speech to American supporters. In a vast hotel ballroom, the crowd whooped as he walked to the lectern. Adams has gleaming, outsized teeth, and I could make them out clearly from the back of the room. Standing in

front of a banner bearing the words "United Ireland," Adams spoke about the importance of American allies in ending "a very long war." His voice is stentorian, and he speaks with schoolmasterly authority; he has the calm aura befitting a global celebrity who flies around the world advising armed factions and heads of state about how to make ceasefires stick.

Then, just as Adams was reminiscing about his first visit to the White House, in 1994, the brute in him came out. Speaking of the Irish *Independent*, which had been publishing critical stories about him, he observed that the paper had also been tough on Michael Collins, the Republican hero of 1916. And how did Collins deal with this affront? "He sent volunteers into their offices, held the editor at gunpoint, and

destroyed the entire printing press." The room, full of Irish-Americans, erupted in applause. Adams leaned into the microphone and murmured, "I'm obviously not advocating that," prompting rau-
cous, knowing laughter.

Michael McConville does not believe that Adams or anyone else will be brought to account for the murder of his mother. "We're all adults here—we all know the score," he told me. Several other people have been arrested for questioning in the case, but only one, Ivor Bell, has been charged. (Bell denies any involvement in McConville's disappearance.) Bell reportedly gave an interview to the Boston College project, and if the case goes to trial prosecutors may use his recorded recollections—which he had offered for posterity, thinking that they would be sealed until after his death—against him. Bell's lawyer, Kevin Winters, assured me that Bell "will fight the charges," and it seems unlikely that the truth about McConville's death will come out in any such proceeding. The physical evidence in the case is diffuse and decades old, so it would be difficult to sustain a conviction against any of the perpetrators. Because Dolours Price and Brendan Hughes are dead, they cannot testify against Adams; in legal terms, their interviews and oral histories amount to hearsay. Adams and his supporters have also gone to great lengths to attack the credibility of Price and Hughes. "Brendan was a friend of mine," Adams told the *Guardian*, in 2011. "But Brendan had his issues and his difficulties. He was opposed to the peace process. He was politically hostile to what we were trying to do. Brendan said what Brendan said, and Brendan's dead. So let it go."

Adams is not wrong about the bitter resentment of his former comrades. Price once described her willingness to identify Adams as a former I.R.A. member as an effort to "settle scores." Nevertheless, it's hard to explain away the very specific, and similar, recollections that Hughes and Price shared about Jean McConville's murder. When the journalist Darragh MacIntyre pressed Adams about McConville in a 2013 BBC documentary, "The Disappeared," Adams, looking like a cornered animal, flashed a hostile grin and noted that

Hughes and Price had “demons.” He added, vaguely, “All of us bear a responsibility, those of us who are in the leadership. I’ve never shirked that.”

Adams declined repeated requests to speak with me for this article, citing, through a representative, the “flawed” nature of the Boston College interviews, which focussed on testimony by “former Republicans who have accused Sinn Fein of betrayal.” He seems to have said his piece on the matter, and if no criminal charges are filed he may never be obliged to say anything further. (Adams continues to be forthcoming on other subjects. Last month, he informed an interviewer on Irish radio that he enjoys jumping on a trampoline. “I do it naked,” he said, adding that he is sometimes accompanied in this regimen by his dog.)

The question of whether or not Jean McConville was an informer will also likely remain unresolved. Michael McConville and his siblings are adamant that Brendan Hughes was mistaken about a transmitter being in the flat, and they doubt his claim that McConville confessed to being an informer. Helen once said, “If they were torturing her, she would have admitted to anything. What mother wouldn’t?”

Family members point to the O’Loan report, but the report says only that no official records were found to indicate that Jean McConville was an informer. If she was a low-level informer, such records might not exist. Moloney and McIntyre, who share an unshakable confidence in the credibility of Brendan Hughes, believe that the British government may also have suppressed the paper trail on McConville in order to conceal the fact that the Army allowed one of its confidential sources to be executed. In any case, the I.R.A. clearly believed that McConville was a tout, though that is no justification for what befell her. When McIntyre asked Brendan Hughes whether he regretted executing McConville, Hughes said that he had supported the decision at the time. “But not now,” he continued. “Because, as everything turned out, not one death was worth it.”

Ed Moloney observes that Adams’s cold-blooded detachment, which so maddened Price and Hughes, may have allowed him to imagine what they could

not—a future beyond the armed struggle—and to create peace. Adams has many unkind things to say about Moloney, but Moloney believes that Adams should have won the Nobel Peace Prize. “Gerry’s a very hollow man,” Brendan Hughes’s brother Terry said, before adding, “But then maybe that’s politics.”

In the long run, the war may be won by demography. Sinn Fein has predicted that a Catholic majority will eventually preside in Northern Ireland, and the percentage of Catholics has increased in recent decades. But this doesn’t mean that the British will soon be voted off the island. After the 2008 fiscal crisis and the subsequent recession in Dublin, some polls found that most Catholics in the north prefer to remain part of the United Kingdom. “Outbreeding Unionists may be an enjoyable pastime for those who have the energy,” Adams has said. “But it hardly amounts to a political strategy.”

For a small minority, the armed struggle never ended. I visited Belfast just before Christmas, and three different splinter factions of the I.R.A. were promising attacks in the city over the holiday. I had wanted to speak with Marian Price, but she was prevented by legal troubles: in 2013, she confessed to having provided a mobile phone that a Republican splinter group used to take responsibility for a shooting at an Army barracks; two British soldiers were killed in the attack. (Her sentence was recently



suspended, but the terms of her release prohibit her from talking to journalists.) “It’s not over,” Anthony McIntyre told me. “It’s still a very dangerous society.”

According to Michael McConville, the police in Northern Ireland have asked him to name the men and women who took his mother away and supply testimony to help convict them. He has refused, he told me, partly out of fear that his wife and children might become victims of reprisal. (He also re-

fused to tell me any of the kidnappers’ names.) Several years ago, he had briefly considered identifying the perpetrators, but he says that when he told Adams of his intentions Adams replied, “I hope you are ready for the backlash.” (Adams has denied saying this.) The authorities offered to give Michael a new identity, and to move him and his family out of the country. Given the terrible toll of the life he has led in Belfast, I asked him why he hadn’t seized this opportunity. Why not move to Australia?

“All my life is here,” he said. “My family. My friends. Why should I leave because of these people?”

“What would you like to see happen?” I asked. I was wondering what form of accountability might bring him a measure of peace. But he may have misunderstood the question.

“I would love to see all the peace walls come down,” he said first. Then he thought for a moment, and added, “Personally, I’d love to see a united Ireland. I would love to see the British not here.”

We were in his living room, and had been talking for hours, and Michael suggested that we take a walk outside. We passed through the back door onto a bright-green expanse of lawn, and approached a series of wooden enclosures that lined the yard. Michael opened one of the doors to reveal a wall lined with little cubbyholes, in which dozens of pigeons warbled and bobbed and shifted their feet. He keeps hundreds of pigeons now, and he races them competitively. “Through the whole Troubles, there was never any hassle between Protestants and Catholics raising pigeons,” he said, delicately cupping one of the birds in his hand. It eyed us nervously, rolling its neck, so that its slate-gray feathers flashed magenta and teal, suddenly iridescent, like a peacock’s.

On race days, Michael releases the birds, and they disappear over the horizon, bound for some far-off destination. Then, eventually, they turn around and come home. He loves that about pigeons. “They may wander,” he said. “But their natural instinct is to come back to the place that they’re born.” ♦

All You Have to Do

Sarah Braunstein



HAND LETTERING BY MOUSECAKE

It was 1972 and Sid Baumwell was hungry. For the salt at the bottom of the pretzel dish, for frozen Mars bars, for appreciation from someone who wasn't a blood relation—preferably a girl with pink cheeks and big sleepy eyes, like the one in "The Graduate," his second-favorite movie of all time. He could do two dozen pull-ups. No acne. He wasn't truly handsome but not bad-looking—handsome enough, he felt, to deserve his hunger. Freckles across the bridge of his nose, slightly splayed feet, respectable height. Smart. He knew this. His teachers told him so when they pulled him aside to say that he wasn't working up to his potential. He had potential, and this mattered more than grades, comforted him more than any A. He held a secret belief that he could, if he really really really wanted to, become President, but he didn't want to, enjoyed his personal freedoms too much—in any case, politicians were chumps. He told himself that as the eldest of three he was sort of like the president of the siblings, though he knew he was too passive, conflict-averse, not enough righteous fury. His sister, Robin, had got all the fury. "Dickweed," she hissed. For six months she had referred to him only as Jack Squat, which didn't seem so mean until you saw her raging eyes. Even then, Sid's response had been to shrug and walk away. When his brother took a Mars bar from the freezer, *Sid's* Mars bar, what did Sid do? He let it go. Faced with his brother's saucer eyes and defective right hand, the chocolate ring around his pale mouth, Sid never found the strength to do anything but shrug.

So, right. He'd be an un-American President, anyway, too much compassion for the retarded and the lame. His mother called him "baby boy" or "Teddy beary." "Shut up, Ma!" he never said, though he was beginning to suspect that he should. A legitimate red-blooded sixteen-year-old boy needed a grievance. Where was his pride? Where! But he never got around to it, and anyhow his mom loved him so much.

At the grocery store one day, picking up milk and powdered doughnuts and three cans of creamed corn, he saw a card table set up near the register. A man in a dark suit stood behind the

table—slicked-back hair, broad shoulders, smiling at Sid as if they were old friends. The man said, "Feel like a winner today, son?"

Sid thought about it. "Maybe?"

"No *maybe* about it. *Maybe* gives the gods a chance to pass you by."

"I feel like a winner," Sid said.

The man extended a hand. This was at a point in Sid's life when he was still flattered when an older man shook his hand, flattered by a handshake so hard it hurt. This handshake went on for a beat too long, but Sid didn't know that. The handshake felt respectful; respect was also something Sid was hungry for. The man said that his name was Bill Baxter, that he was a representative of a regional company that sold aluminum foil, waxed paper, and other fine products that make this hard life easier. He was travelling the area, distributing samples and hosting raffles in grocery stores. Would Sid be interested in a lifetime's supply of aluminum foil?

"We're trying to compete with the national brand," Bill said. "The national brand which shall go nameless."

"Reynolds?"

"It shall go nameless," he repeated, winking. He looked a bit like a spy. Men who even slightly resembled James Bond, who could pass for civilians but had an air of regal deviousness about them, men whose hair coöperated, impressed Sid terribly. And yes he wanted a lifetime's supply of aluminum foil. That sort of thing would win his mother's admiration and soothe his father's financial anxieties—and so Sid wrote his name and phone number on an orange raffle ticket. He dropped the ticket in a fishbowl, already full of orange tickets, and realized that chances were slim he'd win. He said, "I won't win."

Bill showed big white teeth. Capillaries branched across his cheeks like fine lace. He said, "Never know, right? The future's a mystery." He produced a wooden spoon from his suit jacket and stirred the contents of the fishbowl. Then he blew on the spoon and pretended to taste it, wincing in pain as if he'd burned his mouth. Sid laughed. Bill seemed to take pleasure in Sid's laugh; a flush obliterated the capillaries.

"You go to school?" Bill asked, re-

turning the spoon to his suit jacket. But before Sid could answer he said, "Sure you do. Sure thing. You should stay in school, earn good grades, study hard, it's all true." He leaned in closer and, in a tight whisper, like a private message from 007 himself, said, "But T. and A., that's what makes a life."

Sid stepped back. "What?"

Bill smiled gamely. "Study hard, son," he said. "And wash behind your ears."

Those letters played in Sid's head on the walk home. When you stuck them together like that, T. and A., he couldn't help picturing a girl in a disembodied way, just those parts floating in the air, a serial-killer fantasy. So he tried to supply a face. Whose face? Marley Grey's. He pictured Marley's dimples, her sly smile, the fingerprint-size mole at her right temple, that whirly smudge which since kindergarten he was sure meant she'd been touched by a higher power. And though it was true that since kindergarten he'd been three-quarters atheist, the other quarter saw Marley's face and believed. He put her face above the T. and the A.

No. Now she was disjointed—head, breasts, buttocks—like a swaying string puppet. He walked home faster, rearranging his thoughts. His mother was making beef stew and creamed corn tonight. He was DISHES on the chore wheel this week. That meant that his sister was GARBAGE and would complain that it was dangerous for her to go outside alone at night and he'd end up lugging the trash to the curb. Dangerous! There was zero danger here. His mean, unattractive sister fantasized about rapists, but no man paid her any attention at all. So what did Sid do? Feel sorry for her. Take out the trash. Where was *his* fury when he needed it? Where!

As he was crossing McGovern, a car slowed beside him. It was Bill Baxter, rolling down a window. "Need a lift?" he sang.

"I'm not far from home, I guess," Sid called back. Warnings flashed through his head, though those men wore clown costumes or at least sunglasses.

Bill said, "Hop in! I need the company. Anyway, looks like it might rain." And

it was true—the sky was turning a bruisey green-gray, an ozone charge in the air—so Sid got in.

The car was immaculate, a plush maroon interior free of debris, windows spotless. It smelled like peppermint. A blue-and-yellow candy cane hung from the rearview mirror. It couldn't have been further from Sid's family's car, that crumb-filled, gas-stinking station wagon with its roped-on muffler.

"Nice car," Sid said.

Bill gave a heard-it-all laugh. "This heap? This belonged to my old lady. Once it was my old lady's mama's. Those two. You get caught in the crossfire of their chatter, you long for unconsciousness. Where am I taking you?"

Sid explained how to get to his street. They passed the cemetery and the Sweets-N-Freeze and the vet where his cat got put to sleep after she was hit by a sanitation truck.

Sid felt obliged to fill the silence—Bill was a guest in his town, which wasn't unlike having a guest in his home—so he said, "My cat got put to sleep right there."

"They kill your kitty at the ice-cream parlor?"

"Next door. The vet."

Bill nodded, flexed and unflexed his hands on the wheel. "Right. Naturally. I don't mean to jest." Then, after a pause: "I'm not a cat person myself, but I know good people who are."

All four of her legs had been broken. The vet, a woman with a faint mustache and a stack of clinking plastic bracelets on one arm, had taken his mother's hand and said, "Do what's right, Ma'am, that's all you have to do."

"I'm not a cat person either," Sid said. When it was put that way—"cat person"—it sounded creepy. He thought, Just that cat. Just Ponderosa.

"It was mother-in-law's, before she died. And my wife's, before she took off with Sal the Salamander Bristol. Now it's mine. Play your cards right, it could be yours!"

"A cat?"

"The car. I'm talking about this car now."

They passed the public library; they passed Louis Lombardo, fat and schizophrenic, wearing the uniform of the job he'd long since lost, still prun-

ing the bushes at Town Hall. He was Loony Lou. He weeded and trimmed and sometimes left bouquets on the doorsteps of certain women who were way out of his league, including—Sid heard from kids at school—Marley's mother. Lou worked with manic intensity, hurried from one patch of civic vegetation to another, park to library to school. No one paid him a cent, but supposedly his services allowed the city council to cut back on its landscaping budget.

"You interested in cars?" Bill asked.

"Sure," Sid said, though it wasn't quite true. He was interested in cars the way he was interested in "careers" or "marriage"—someday he'd partake, maybe, hopefully, but for now these categories had nothing to do with him.

"Zero to sixty in half an hour," Bill said. "All requests for acceleration must be submitted in writing. You get it? This car lacks power. I'd rather have a—No, I'd rather have nothing. This is the car that was preferred by my mother-in-law, and I take what I can get. You play your cards right, she could be yours. I'm in the process of letting go."

"It's so clean," Sid heard himself say. He touched the window, left a greasy print, wiped it with the sleeve of his shirt.

"Clean? Certainly. The objects in a man's life reflect his spirit."

Sid said, "What do you mean, if I play my cards right?"

Bill was silent. Then he took a long, grave breath, like a swimmer before the dive, and said, "I'm making decisions about my life. I might start giving things away. I can't decide if it's better to be wed to nothing. Or if it's better to collect, to defend yourself with things. The things you own own you. Who said that? I can't remember. What do you think?"

"I don't own anything," Sid said.

The shelf above his bed held one participation trophy, a sea shell the size of his ear, and an unopened complete set of Topps baseball cards from the year of his birth. Somewhere in that shrink-wrapped box, an immaculate Ted Williams.

Sid said, "I don't own anything important."

"You like it that way?"

He didn't. He kept a list in his wallet of things he wanted: cowboy boots, an onyx fountain pen, an old-fashioned shaving kit with a boar-bristle brush, a new wallet.

"I don't know what I like yet," Sid said.

"Of course you do. What you *like* doesn't come with age. It's innate. How old are you, son?"

"Sixteen."

"Experience is overrated. Who said that?"

"I don't know."

"I did! Just now! Aren't you paying attention?"

Sid laughed, but to be honest he was starting to feel uneasy. "Take a left here."

"I'm divorced." Bill took the turn a little too fast. "Wife got a new life. I got the car. Good riddance."

"You been doing this long?"

"Picking up kids? You're the first, I promise."

"I meant the foil."

"I know what you meant. Long enough. I've been a salesman forever. Shoes first. Various chemical products. This is a sideline." He ran a hand through his perfect hair. "Look, is it weird to say I see myself in you?"

"I don't know—a little?" Sid felt as if he were in a movie. The queasy-looking sky, the clean car, the forcefulness of Bill's voice, the presence of Bill's cooperative hair next to his own mopey cowlicky mess. It made him feel like there was a camera nearby.

Bill said, "You're a bright kid, I can tell. You've got an astute face. I'm good at reading faces. So can I ask: this town. How do you handle it?"

"Handle it how?"

"That's what I'm asking. I can't imagine growing up here. So small. So dim. Two days here feels like two weeks. I'm trying to figure out a place to go. I can go anywhere. Tell me why I should stay here. Make a case for *this town*. I want to be convinced of something. Convince me."

Sid said that he'd never lived anywhere else, so he couldn't make a case for the town. As soon as he graduated from high school, he was leaving. "But it's not a bad place. Not at all. People are nice."

"Nice is the kiss of death."

"I know what you mean."

"Sure you know. You're sixteen but you're no fool."

"Here," Sid said. "My house."

Bill pulled over. They looked at it together: chalky blue shingles, faded shutters, metal watering can on the concrete stoop, scrappy hydrangea.

"Home again home again," Bill said, and sighed. "I see exactly how it feels."

Sid opened the passenger door. The spring air smelled rude, animal, after the crisp peppermint of the car. He hesitated a moment. He said, "How do you know how it feels?", and heard a trace of defensiveness in his voice.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, kid."

"You didn't."

But why shouldn't he feel defensive? This was his home, after all. He was born in this town's two-story hospital, had been kept alive and well by its tater tots and crosswalks and elderly crossing guards. This town's good-hearted teachers had urged his hand across so many cursive worksheets. It was for this town's warm, metallic water that he'd learned to heave his tiny self onto giant water fountains.

And yet in certain ways Sid couldn't really see the town, could he? An outsider, a judgmental outsider, could tell him things.

"You didn't hurt my feelings," he said, more forcefully.

All at once, the windshield was covered with mist.

Bill said, "Most people don't have an appetite for truth, I've learned."

"The truth doesn't bother me."

"No?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"That's very good to know."

Sid swallowed. "So how does it feel?"

"How does what feel?"

"This town."

"You want to know?"

"I do."

"It feels . . ." Bill paused. The rain got stronger. "It feels like tomorrow won't come fast enough. Like today's some lazy bum with his feet on the coffee table, no intention of going anywhere ever at all. Like you could wave a stick of dynamite in today's face and it wouldn't even wince. Does that seem about right?"

Sid said it did seem about right, yes.

He hugged his grocery bag to his chest. He got out of the car. Bill flicked on his wipers, lifted a hand, was gone.

The next evening, at dinnertime, the phone rang. His mother answered, crinkled her brow. People weren't supposed to call at dinnertime. They were just about to sit down. The table was spread with five settings, a basket of six rolls, veal cutlets, peas, five glasses of milk. They all drank milk, even Sid's dad. It was his mother's one non-negotiable demand. For the past week they'd been using pink doily napkins left over from his sister's birthday party.

"For you," his mother told Sid. "Joan? You know a Joan?"

Sid shook his head. He picked up the phone in the living room.

"Is this Sid?"

"Yes, it is."

"I'm happy to report you're the winner of a lifetime supply of aluminum foil."

"I am? Really? For real?"

"You are—really. For real." She seemed irritated.

Then: "Wait, who is this?"

"My name is Joan."

"Bill . . ."

"I'm the secretary."

He was disappointed.

"I won?" he said again. "Really? That's great!"

"How old are you, Sid?"

"Sixteen . . . Is that O.K.? I don't need to be an adult to win, do I?"

"I suppose not."

"Bill invited me to enter."

"That's fine," the woman said in a tired voice. "Don't get all riled up."

A kind of pressure was mounting in his chest—a sense of victory. More than victory. A sense of triumph—as if this unlikely win (that fishbowl had been full) foretold other, bigger, more encompassing wins.

"A truck will arrive on Saturday morning to deliver the aluminum foil. You will be available then to receive it?"

He said he would be. He gave his address.

His family had begun eating without him. He sat down, unfolded his napkin, and announced the news.

His sister said flatly, derisively, "Holy shit, wow."

"Holy smokes," his mother urged. And to Sid: "Where did you meet this man? He had a fishbowl?"

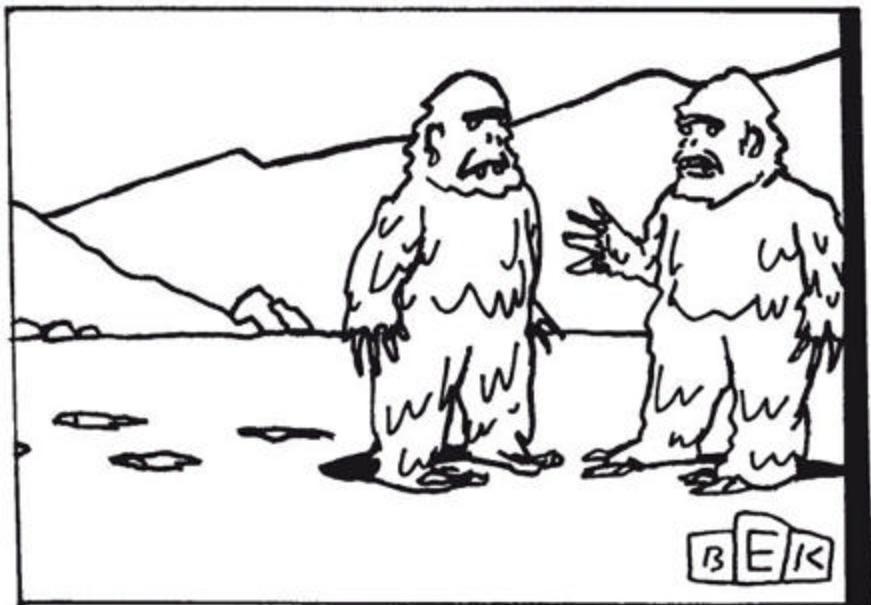
"At Marvin's. Near the register. The bowl was full of tickets."

"Fine print?" his father said.

"No fine print." Sid lifted his chest. "They're delivering it Saturday."

"No fine print," his mother said. She was beaming. "And we need that! Did you know it? Aluminum foil is on my grocery list!"

Sid's father, who was allowed certain



"No one is completely abominable."

curse words, who got two dinner rolls, said, "Hot damn, son."

Ricky pretended to be bored but was obviously jealous. Sid sensed his brother's envy and said, "Lucky break, I guess," because he was a good brother.

His mother went to the kitchen, returned with a piece of paper that read *pie stuff, detergent, alum foil, choco sprinkles, thyme*. Across the top of the stationery were the words "Mother knows best," in all caps, between two bunches of daffodils. The pad had been a gift from Sid on her previous birthday. With a stubby pencil, she drew a line through *alum foil*, then thrust the paper into Sid's hand.

"Keep that," she said.

He kept it. He kept it longer than he kept a lot of things.

On Friday afternoon, Sid and his brother cleared a wall of the garage, dumped old magazines and rags and broken toys, dumped the mildewed hobby horse they'd ridden as kids, dumped half-empty motor-oil containers, paint cans. They worked for a cou-

ple of hours preparing for the arrival of aluminum foil. His mother, meanwhile, baked a lasagna; Sid understood that her intention was to praise him, after dinner, by covering the leftovers with a sheet of his bounty.

On Saturday, the truck arrived, bearing the name of the regional manufacturer on its side. A man who was not Bill descended from the cab.

"It's here!" Sid called. His parents rushed to the door. The three of them stood on the front stoop. The deliveryman took a couple of steps onto the crabgrass lawn. He read from a clipboard. "Sid . . . uh . . . Bomb-Wall?"

"Bowem-well," his father said, proudly, as if their name meant something, was not an Ellis Island concoction.

"I'm Sid," Sid said. "Me."

"Okeydoke," the guy said.

"It can go in the garage," Sid said.

The deliveryman went to the truck, opened the back, climbed inside, and emerged holding a small cardboard box. This he carried up the walkway and handed to Sid.

Inside were eight rolls.

That was it. A lifetime supply. Why had they imagined boxes and boxes? On the curb, mocking them, sat a pile of garbage bags full of the junk they'd cleared out of the garage.

The delivery truck left. Still they stood on the stoop.

"Well done," his mother said. She tousled his hair.

"Eight?" His father's mouth got small, strained. "Cheap buggers."

His mother scowled. "Don't do that! What do they say? About the gift horse?" She turned to Sid. "This was on my list," she reminded him.

He'd let them down. He felt like Bill was mocking him. *Was Bill mocking him?*

His parents went back into the house, but Sid stayed on the stoop.

Only now did he realize that Bill had picked his ticket on purpose. How could he have realized this only now? How had he failed to understand this right away?

At dinner that night, he saw clearly the meagreness of their life. Those sad party napkins, the nicks in the wooden table, the cheapness of their clothes. His mother's polyester top, its polka dots stretched weirdly over her weirdly big breasts. His whole life he would buy Reynolds, he decided. "Eat up!" his mother said. "First person to finish gets seconds." All that remained of the lasagna was the crispy edge pieces.

A few weeks later, as Sid walked home from school, the maroon car slowed down next to him. It wasn't like Sid to get angry, let alone stay angry, and yet since the delivery he'd been nursing anger and abashedness in equal measure. Abashedness because what the hell was wrong? What could he complain about? Nothing! But anger, even so. For the smallness of the lifetime supply. For his father's disappointment. For how sad it made him to see how readily his father would have been soothed by a great quantity of anything. Bill had done it on purpose. He seemed—in some essential way—like a con man.

Sid was angry for those reasons. But also, if he was honest with himself, because he'd expected Bill to return. He'd expected him to call on the phone with congratulations, with the pretense of

TACTLESS ABE



congratulations, in order to say more outrageous, electric things.

And so when Sid saw Bill's car he felt not anger but a flash of relief.

Bill rolled down the window.

"Cuppa joe? On me."

"I don't drink joe," Sid said.

Inside the car, classical music was playing. The candy cane still hung from the rearview mirror. That candy cane wouldn't have lasted a minute if this were Sid's car. His appetite for sugar was legendary. Or maybe it was a different candy cane? Maybe Bill kept a bag in the glove compartment and replaced it continually? It would comfort Sid, somehow, to learn that Bill loved sugar, too.

They drove down LeMay Street, green lights all the way.

Bill said, "Coffee won't stunt your growth if that's what you're worried about."

"I'm not worried."

"Old wives' tale. I've been sucking at the java teat since I was—six? seven?"

Sid said, "I'm not worried about my growth."

"You're tall enough." Bill's voice was tight, almost mean. "And true stature is internal, anyhow."

"I don't like the taste."

"You sound like a teen-ager. 'Taste' is teen-ager business. What *do* you like the taste of?"

"Whiskey," Sid said, and this cut the tension. Bill laughed; Sid laughed. Like a laugh between old friends, easy, warm, which in the next moment alarmed him, because why should they be friends?

"Where do you want to go?" Bill asked. "No coffee, fine. I'd take you to a bar, but you're just sixteen."

"I'm on my way home from school."

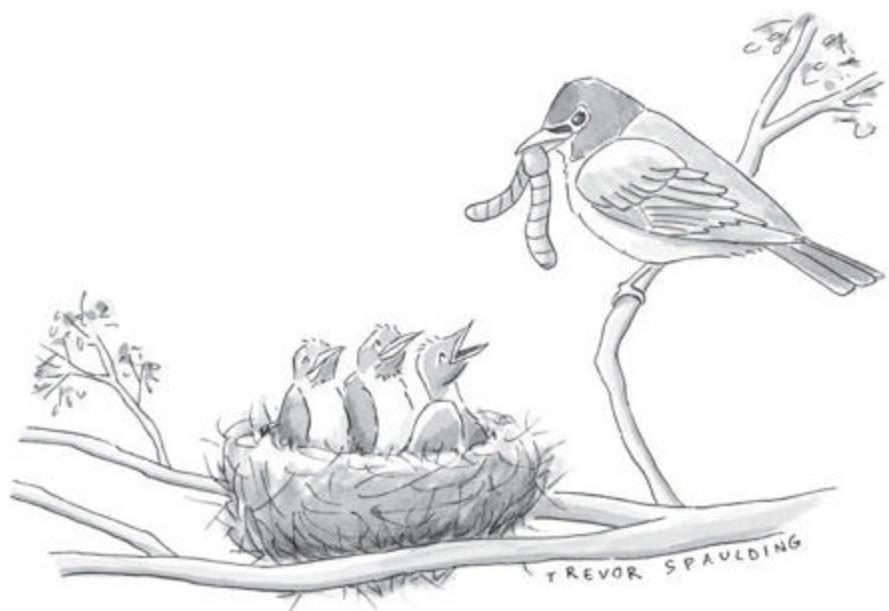
"Home's no good. Home's just the starting line."

"My mother's expecting me. She's making lamb chops."

"What's the highest place in this town? Let's go there!"

The highest place wasn't very high, a clearing on a hill from which you could see the light-bulb factory and a playground. When they got there, Bill turned off the car. The music stopped, which Sid regretted, yet he didn't feel he had the right to ask Bill to turn it back on.

"You picked my ticket," Sid said.



"Mom usually chews it up for us."

"Now, why would I do that?" Bill opened the glove compartment. No candy canes but a silver flask. He unscrewed the top, took a long sip, and offered it to Sid.

Sid hesitated.

"You and your friends drink in cars?"

He didn't have many friends. Just Chip and Lilo, sometimes Joshua, and they drank Kool-Aid and played Stratego in Lilo's basement. They got drunk on nothing but humid, laundry-scented basement air and the occasional glimpse of Lilo's mom's cleavage and calves when she lumbered downstairs, laundry basket on one hip, toddler on the other.

Sid said, "We don't have cars."

"You want one?"

"Who doesn't?"

"Drink," Bill told him.

Sid took the flask. He drank.

"You won fair and square," Bill said. "You have to accept that, son. You're blessed like that. Can you accept that?"

Blessed! The word stung him, thrilled him, and in this way felt exactly like the whiskey going down. For the rest of his life, every time he took a sip of whiskey, the word that would describe the sensation—that *was* the sensation—was "blessed."

"I know you picked it," Sid said.

"That's not polite, son. Contradicting an elder."

"O.K., I won fair and square."

"That's right."

New leaves on the trees, a wide open sky. Down on the playground, bands of children assaulted the swings. Their coats littered the perimeter.

Bill's hair was perfect. How did he get his hair so perfect? Sid felt the urge to ask what sort of grease he used in it, how he got his teeth so white. Bill came from a universe where men knew these things. Sid was ninety-nine-point-nine-per-cent sure that he himself would fail to find this universe, either because it didn't exist anymore or because he'd get lost on the way—maybe, likely, both. His father had never found it. His father's floppy, thinning hair was tamed by three swoops of an electric razor. His father would never know shaken or stirred.

"I'm thinking about giving away my belongings," Bill said. He tossed the flask back again, swallowed, exhaled through his teeth. "Let's say I gave you a pair of silver cufflinks. What would you say to that?"

"That I couldn't accept."

"Your manners will be the death of you."

Sid took another sip. Blessed. Blessed. Down below, the children assembled for tug-of-war.

"If I gave you a shirt with French

cuffs and some silver cufflinks, would you wear them? Would you have the guts to wear them to school? I know how kids your age dress. No one has any pride. Would you wear a suit to school if I gave you a suit?"

Sid decided that he would forgo his good manners, would be candid, that the novelty of the moment, their new altitude, gave him permission.

He said, "I would never wear a suit to school."

It embarrassed Sid how ugly he must look to Bill, in his sweatshirt and ratty jeans, but to show up at school in a suit and cufflinks would be worse than death. He thought of Marley. Her whole alphabet body. She would laugh at him.

"People would laugh at me."

"So?"

"So I'd rather not get that kind of attention."

"You know a better kind?"

"Of course."

Alan Desmarais, president of the student council three years running. The girls rushed him in the cafeteria. He had the biggest Adam's apple of anyone at Monroe High, teachers included. Once, he'd winked at Sid when they passed in the hall. Pandering. Paternalistic. The kind of attention Alan got, the power it afforded him—he could taunt with only a wink.

But there was a worse kind of attention also. Sid knew this. Like Ricky's defect, his claw hand forever cupped at his side, as if to cradle a baby bird. *Mitten it! Mitten it!* For a period of time in elementary school, this had been the playground chant. And even then Sid, older by two years, hadn't had the balls to beat up Oliver and Max and that lunatic Susan Kipper, whose boobs were bigger than her brain, even in fifth grade. She of all people should have been understanding about defects. He could do nothing but wait, helpless, dumb, the furthest thing from presidential. Where was his anger? Where!

"I try to take the middle road," Sid finally said. "Blend in."

"Blending is for cooks. Fear isn't any way to conduct a life. You should wear a suit if it pleases you. Cufflinks, at least."

Bill's voice was wise. It knew. To hold

Bill's cufflinks in his hand—just imagining their lightness in his palm—filled him with a desire to transcend his boyhood *right now*.

Bill said, reading his mind, "You're a special kid, Sid."

And then he unbuckled his seat belt. Sid felt a change in the air. A charge. It had never happened in his life, he had never once been kissed, and yet he felt

with surety: he is going to kiss me. Bill is going to kiss me. Bill is going to kiss me.

Bill didn't move.

Sid's body thrummed. Deep shivery calm, like when his mother ran her long fingernails down his neck after she tried and failed to tame his hair. He

was still, waited, but Bill didn't kiss him. Instead, Bill said, "We're after the perfect woman, you and me. Except she doesn't exist. Or she does but she's hiding. In the meantime, we make do. I want to give you some bookends. They're made of amber. In the trunk. Don't let me forget to give them to you. Promise you won't forget?"

Sid said, "I don't need bookends."

"Someday you will. You'll have a den full of books."

The shivery feeling lifted. He felt profoundly dumb. Why had he thought that this man would kiss him? What sort of lunatic was he? The word "homosexual" sputtered like a flame in his brain and, mercifully, went out.

"The lifetime supply was only eight rolls," Sid said.

Bill sighed deeply. "You heard about the mouth of the gift horse, kid?"

"I have."

"You'll be lucky if you get through five before the Reaper comes, studies say."

Bill put his seat belt back on. He started up the car. The music resumed.

On the way home they passed the Sweets-N-Freeze and Looney Lou spinning in the roses and a bunch of ill-dressed boys playing stickball. They passed many mothers pushing strollers.

When they pulled up in front of Sid's house, Bill said, "Maybe one day you'll wake up and find this car in your driveway. I'll be gone. You'll find the keys in the ignition. One day. Maybe soon. Will you keep an eye out?"

The bones in Bill's face glowed in the late sunlight. He was handsome, like a magazine man. But close to an edge. What edge? The edge of what? He was not dangerous—Sid understood it now—but in danger. He was lost.

"Will you keep an eye out?" Bill asked again, a touch of plaintiveness in his voice.

Sid didn't know what to say. What if the car showed up in the driveway? Would he get in it? Would he drive away? Could he? Was there a perfect girl hiding somewhere? He didn't believe enough in anything, or only in doubt and in waiting—only those two things one hundred and ten per cent, and those were the worst things on earth.

Inside, his mother was making her lamb chops. She called them her legendary lamb chops. What's for dinner tonight, Ma? Legendary lamb chops. He felt so sorry for her, so grateful for her. He suppressed the reflex to invite Bill in to dinner. Instead, he said, "I'll keep an eye out."

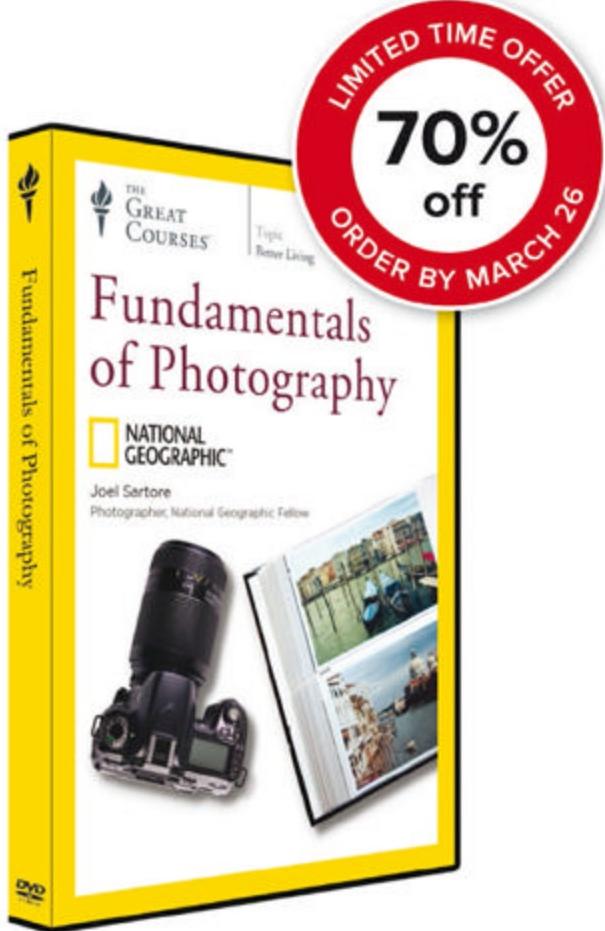
Bill nodded. It was time to go.

"I'm sorry about the foil, kid." He seemed to mean it. "I wish it were better. We get the prizes we deserve is what I've come to believe. You'll win many more prizes in your life, big and little both. My days of prizes are over but yours aren't, I guarantee that."

Sid kept an eye out. He would wake up every day and check the driveway for the car. Before peeing, before brushing his teeth—he would look outside. First.

Sid looked down and saw that his hand was being touched by Bill's hand. Bill's long, cool fingers rested lightly on his own. He was filled with calm, alert curiosity. His impulse was to stay perfectly still, to freeze, like when a ladybug lands on your hand. Or not a ladybug—something weirder. A glowy beetle, an insect you'd never for a second believe lived in your ho-hum corner of the universe. But it does. It is showing you. Stay still. Do not move a muscle. That thing could have landed anywhere, on anything. The word for this is luck. ♦





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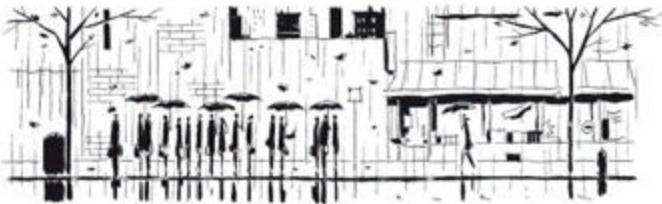
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THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

GIRL, INTERRUPTED

Who was Sappho?

BY DANIEL MENDELSONH

One day not long after New Year's, 2012, an antiquities collector approached an eminent Oxford scholar for his opinion about some brownish, tattered scraps of writing. The collector's identity has never been revealed, but the scholar was Dirk Obbink, a MacArthur-winning classicist whose specialty is the study of texts written on papyrus—the material, made of plant fibres, that was the paper of the ancient world. When pieced together, the scraps that the collector showed Obbink formed a fragment about seven inches long and four inches wide: a little larger than a woman's hand. Densely covered with lines of black Greek characters, they had been extracted from a piece of desiccated cartonnage, a papier-mâché-like plaster that the Egyptians and Greeks used for everything from mummy cases to bookbindings. After acquiring the cartonnage at a Christie's auction, the collector soaked it in a warm water solution to free up the precious bits of papyrus.

Judging from the style of the handwriting, Obbink estimated that it dated to around 200 A.D. But, as he looked at the curious pattern of the lines—repeated sequences of three long lines followed by a short fourth—he saw that the text, a poem whose beginning had disappeared but of which five stanzas were still intact, had to be older.

Much older: about a thousand years more ancient than the papyrus itself. The dialect, diction, and metre of these Greek verses were all typical of the

work of Sappho, the seventh-century-B.C. lyric genius whose sometimes playful, sometimes anguished songs about her susceptibility to the graces of younger women bequeathed us the adjectives "sapphic" and "lesbian" (from the island of Lesbos, where she lived). The four-line stanzas were in fact part of a schema she is said to have invented, called the "sapphic stanza." To clinch the identification, two names mentioned in the poem were ones that several ancient sources attribute to Sappho's brothers. The text is now known as the "Brothers Poem."

Remarkably enough, this was the second major Sappho find in a decade: another nearly complete poem, about the deprivations of old age, came to light in 2004. The new additions to the extant corpus of antiquity's greatest female artist were reported in papers around the world, leaving scholars gratified and a bit dazzled. "Papyrological finds," as one classicist put it, "ordinarily do not make international headlines."

But then Sappho is no ordinary poet. For the better part of three millennia, she has been the subject of furious controversies—about her work, her family life, and, above all, her sexuality. In antiquity, literary critics praised her "sublime" style, even as comic playwrights ridiculed her allegedly loose morals. Legend has it that the early Church burned her works. ("A sex-crazed whore who sings of her own wantonness," one theologian wrote, just

as a scribe was meticulously copying out the lines that Obbink deciphered.) A millennium passed, and Byzantine grammarians were regretting that so little of her poetry had survived. Seven centuries later, Victorian scholars were doing their best to explain away her erotic predilections, while their literary contemporaries, the Decadents and the Aesthetes, seized on her verses for inspiration. Even today, experts can't agree on whether the poems were performed in private or in public, by soloists or by choruses, or, indeed, whether they were meant to celebrate or to subvert the conventions of love and marriage. The last is a particularly loaded issue, given that, for many readers and scholars, Sappho has been a feminist heroine or a gay role model, or both. "As far as I knew, there was only me and a woman called Sappho," the critic Judith Butler once remarked.

Now the first English translation of Sappho's works to include the recent finds has appeared: "Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works" (Cambridge), with renderings by Diane J. Rayor and a thoroughgoing introduction by André Lardinois, a Sappho specialist who teaches in the Netherlands. (Publication of the book was delayed by several months to accommodate the "Brothers Poem.") It will come as no surprise to those who have followed the Sappho wars that the new poems have created new controversies.

The greatest problem for Sappho studies is that there's so little Sappho to study. It would be hard to think of another poet whose status is so disproportionate to the size of her surviving body of work.

We don't even know how much of her poetry Sappho actually wrote down. The ancients referred to her works as *melé*, "songs." Composed to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre—this is what "lyric" poetry meant for the Greeks—they may well have been passed down from memory by her admirers and other poets before being committed at last to paper. (Or whatever. One fragment, in which the poet calls on Aphrodite, the goddess of love, to come into a charming shrine "where cold water ripples through apple branches, the whole place shadowed in roses,"



New papyrus finds are refining our idea of Sappho. Some scholars question how personal her erotic poems actually are.

was scribbled onto a broken clay pot.) Like other great poets of the time, she would have been a musician and a performer as well as a lyricist. She was credited with having invented a certain kind of lyre and the plectrum.

Four centuries after her death, scholars at the Library of Alexandria catalogued nine “books”—papyrus scrolls—of Sappho’s poems, organized primarily by metre. Book 1, for instance, gathered all the poems that had been composed in the sapphic stanza—the verse form Obbink recognized in the “Brothers Poem.” This book alone reportedly contained thirteen hundred and twenty lines of verse; the contents of all nine volumes may have amounted to some ten thousand lines. So much of Sappho was circulating in antiquity that one Greek author, writing three centuries after her death, confidently predicted that “the white columns of Sappho’s lovely song endure / and will endure, speaking out loud . . . as long as ships sail from the Nile.”

By the Middle Ages, nearly everything had disappeared. As with much of classical literature, texts of her work existed in relatively few copies, all painstakingly transcribed by hand. Over time, fire, flood, neglect, and bookworms—to say nothing of disapproving Church Fathers—took their devastating toll. Market forces were also at work: as the centuries passed, fewer readers—and fewer scribes—understood Aeolic, the dialect in which Sappho composed, and so demand for new copies diminished. A twelfth-century Byzantine scholar who had hoped to write about Sappho grumbled that “both Sappho and her works, the lyrics and the songs, have been trashed by time.”

Until a hundred years ago or so, when papyrus fragments of her poems started turning up, all that remained of those “white columns of Sappho’s song” was a handful of lines quoted in the works of later Greek and Roman authors. Some of these writers were interested in Lesbos’s most famous daughter for reasons that can strike us as comically arcane: the only poem that has survived in its entirety—a playful hymn to Aphrodite in which the poet calls upon the goddess to be her “comrade in arms” in an erotic escapade—was saved for posterity because the

author of a first-century-B.C. treatise called “On the Arrangement of Words” admired her handling of vowels. At present, scholars have catalogued around two hundred and fifty fragments, of which fewer than seventy contain complete lines. A great many consist of just a few words; some, of a single word.

The common theme of most ancient responses to Sappho’s work is rapturous admiration for her exquisite style or for her searing content, or both. An anecdote from a later classical author about the Athenian legislator Solon, a contemporary of Sappho’s and one of the Seven Sages of Greece, is typical:

Solon of Athens, son of Execestides, after hearing his nephew singing a song of Sappho’s over the wine, liked the song so much that he told the boy to teach it to him. When someone asked him why he was so eager, he replied, “so that I may learn it and then die.”

Plato, whose attitude toward literature was, to say the least, vexed—he thought most poetry had no place in the ideal state—is said to have called her the “Tenth Muse.” The scholars at the Library of Alexandria enshrined her in their canon of nine lyric geniuses—the only woman to be included. At least two towns on Lesbos vied for the distinction of being her birthplace; Aristotle reports that she “was honored although she was a woman.”

All this buzz is both titillating and frustrating, stoking our appetite for a body of work that we’re unable to read, much less assess critically: imagine what the name Homer would mean to Western civilization if all we had of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was their reputations and, say, ninety lines of each poem. The Greeks, in fact, seem to have thought of Sappho as the female counterpart of Homer: he was known as “the Poet,” and they referred to her as “the Poetess.” Many scholars now see her poetry as an attempt to appropriate and “feminize” the diction and subject matter of the *Iliad*. (For instance, the appeal to Aphrodite to be her “comrade in arms”—in love.)

The good news is that the surviving fragments of Sappho bear out the ancient verdict. One fine example is her best-known verse, known to classicists as Fragment 31, which consists

of four sapphic stanzas. (They appear below in my own translation.) These were singled out by the author of a first-century-A.D. literary treatise called “On the Sublime” for the way in which they “select and juxtapose the most striking, intense symptoms of erotic passion.” Here the speaker expresses her envy of the men who, presumably in the course of certain kinds of social occasions, have a chance to talk to the girl she yearns for:

He seems to me an equal of the gods—
whoever gets to sit across from you
and listen to the sound of your sweet
speech
so close to him,

to your beguiling laughter: O it makes my
panicked heart go fluttering in my chest,
for the moment I catch sight of you
there’s no
speech left in me,

but tongue gags: all at once a faint
fever courses down beneath the skin,
eyes no longer capable of sight, a thrum-
ming in the ears,

and sweat drips down my body, and the
shakes
lay siege to me all over, and I’m greener
than grass, I’m just a little short of dying,
I seem to me;

but all must be endured, since even a
pauper . . .

Even without its final lines (which, maddeningly, the author of the treatise didn’t go on to quote), it’s a remarkable work. Slyly, the speaker avoids physical description of the girl, instead evoking her beauty by detailing the effect it has on the beholder; the whole poem is a kind of reaction shot. The verses subtly enact the symptoms they describe: as the poet’s faculties fail one by one in the overpowering presence of her beloved, the outside world—the girl, the man she’s talking to—dissolves and disappears from the poem, too, leaving the speaker in a kind of interior echo chamber. The arc from “he seems to me” in the first line to the solipsistic “I seem to me” at the end says it all.

Even the tiniest scraps can be potent, as Rayor’s lucid and comprehensive translation makes clear. (Until now, the most noteworthy English version to include renderings of virtually every fragment was “If Not, Winter,” the 2002 translation by the poet and classicist Anne Carson.) To flip through these

truncated texts is a strangely moving experience, one that has been compared to “reading a note in a bottle”:

You came, I yearned for you,
and you cooled my senses that burned
with desire

or

love shook my senses
like wind crashing on mountain oaks

or

Maidenhood, my maidenhood, where
have you gone
leaving me behind?
Never again will I come to you, never
again

or—the lines in which the notion of desire as “bittersweet” appears for the first time in Western literature—

Once again Love, that loosener of limbs,
bittersweet and inescapable, crawling
thing,
seizes me.

The very incompleteness of the verses can heighten the starkness of the emotions—a fact that a number of contemporary classicists and translators have made much of. For Stanley Lombardo, whose “Sappho: Poems and Fragments” (2002) offers a selection of about a quarter of the fragments, the truncated remains are like “beautiful, isolated limbs.” Thomas Habinek, a classicist at the University of Southern California, has nicely summed up this rather postmodern aspect of Sappho’s appeal: “The fragmentary preservation of poems of yearning and separation serves as a reminder of the inevitable incompleteness of human knowledge and affection.”

In Sappho’s biography, as in her work, gaps predominate. A few facts can be inferred by triangulating various sources: the poems themselves, ancient reference works, citations in later classical writers who had access to information that has since been lost. The “Suda,” a tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia of ancient culture, which is the basis of much of our information, asserts that Sappho “flourished” between 612 and 608 B.C.; from this, scholars have concluded that she was born around 640. She was likely past middle age when she died, since in at least one poem she complains about her graying hair and cranky knees.

Although her birthplace cannot be verified, Sappho seems to have lived mostly in Mytilene, the capital of Lesbos. Just across the strip of water that separates Lesbos from the mainland of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) was the opulent city of Sardis, the capital of Lydia. Some classicists have argued that the proximity of Lesbos to this lush Eastern trading hub helps to explain Sappho’s taste for visual gorgeousness and sensual luxury: the “myrrh, cassia, and frankincense,” the “bracelets, fragrant / purple robes, iridescent trinkets, / countless silver cups, and ivory” that waft and glitter in her lines, often in striking counterpoint to their raw emotionality.

Mytilene was constantly seething with political and social dramas occasioned by rivalries and shifting alliances among aristocratic clans. Sappho belonged to one of these—there’s a fragment in which she chastises a friend “of bad character” for siding with a rival clan—and a famous literary contemporary, a poet called Alcaeus, belonged to another. Alcaeus often refers to the island’s political turbulence in his poems, and it’s possible that at some point Sappho and her family fled, or were exiled, to Southern Italy: Cicero refers in one of his speeches to a statue of the poet that had been erected in the town hall of Syracuse, in Sicily. The

Victorian critic John Addington Symonds saw the unstable political milieu of Sappho’s homeland as entwined with the heady erotic climate of her poems. Lesbos, he wrote in an 1872 essay on the poet, was “the island of overmastering passions.”

Some things seem relatively certain, then. But when it comes to Sappho’s personal life—the aspect of her biography that scholars and readers are most eager to know about—the ancient record is confused. What did Sappho look like? A dialogue by Plato, written in the fourth century B.C., refers to her as “beautiful”; a later author insisted that she was “very ugly, being short and swarthy.” Who were her family? The Suda (which gives eight possible names for Sappho’s father) asserts that she had a daughter and a mother both named Kleis, a gaggle of brothers, and a wealthy husband named Kerkylas, from the island of Andros. But some of these seemingly precious facts merely show that the encyclopedia—which, as old as it is, was compiled fifteen centuries after Sappho lived—could be prone to comic misunderstandings. “Kerkylas,” for instance, looks a lot like *kerkos*, Greek slang for “penis,” and “Andros” is very close to the word for “man”; and so the encyclopedia turns out to have been unwittingly recycling a tired old joke about oversexed Sappho,





who was married to "Dick of Man."

Many other alleged facts of Sappho's biography similarly dissolve on close scrutiny. Was Sappho really a mother? There is indeed a fragment that mentions a girl named Kleis, "whose form resembles golden blossoms," but the word that some people have translated as "daughter" can also mean "child," or even "slave." (Because Greek children were often named for their grandparents, it's easy to see how the already wobbly assumption that Kleis must have been a daughter in turn led to the assertion that Sappho had a mother with the same name.) Who were the members of her circle? The Suda refers by name to three female "students," and three female companions—Atthis, Telesippa, and Megara—with whom she had "disgraceful friendships." But much of this is no more than can be reasonably extrapolated from the poems: the extant fragments mention nearly all those names. The compilers of the Suda, like scholars today, may have been making educated guesses.

Even Sappho's sexuality, which for modern readers is the most famous thing about her, has been controversial from the start. However exalted her reputation among the ancient literati, in Greek popular culture of the Clas-

sical period and afterward Sappho was known primarily as an oversexed predator—of men. This, in fact, was the ancient cliché about "Lesbians": when we hear the word today we think of love between women, but when the ancient Greeks heard the word they thought of blow jobs. In classical Greek, the verb *lesbiazein*—"to act like someone from Lesbos"—meant performing fellatio, an activity for which inhabitants of the island were thought to have a particular penchant. Comic playwrights and authors of light verse portrayed Sappho as just another daughter of Lesbos, only too happy to fall into bed with her younger male rivals.

For centuries, the most popular story about her love life was one about a hopeless passion for a handsome young boatman called Phaon, which allegedly led her to jump off a cliff. That tale has been embroidered, dramatized, and novelized over the centuries by writers from Ovid—who in one poem has Sappho abjectly renouncing her gay past—to Erica Jong, in her 2003 novel "Sappho's Leap." As fanciful as it is, it's easy to see how this melodrama of heterosexual passion could have been inspired by her verse, which so often describes the anguish of unrequited love. ("You have forgotten me/or you love someone else more.") The added ele-

ment of suicide suggests that those who wove this improbable story wanted us to take away a moral: unfettered expressions of great passion will have dire consequences.

As time went on, the fantasies about Sappho's private life became more extreme. Midway through the first century A.D., the Roman philosopher Seneca, tutor to Nero, was complaining about a Greek scholar who had devoted an entire treatise to the question of whether Sappho was a prostitute. Some ancient writers assumed that there had to have been two Sapphos: one the great poet, the other the notorious slut. There is an entry for each in the Suda.

The uncertainties plaguing the biography of literature's most famous Lesbian explain why classicists who study Sappho like to cite the entry for her in Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's "Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary" (1979). To honor Sappho's central position in the history of female homosexuality, the two editors devoted an entire page to her. The page is blank.

The controversies about Sappho's sexuality have never been far from the center of scholarship about her. Starting in the early nineteenth century, when classics itself was becoming a formal discipline, scholars who were embarrassed by what they found in the fragments worked hard to whitewash Sappho's reputation. The title of one early work of German scholarship is "Sappho Liberated from a Prevalent Prejudice": in it, the author acknowledged that what Sappho felt for her female friends was "love" but hastened to insist that it was in no way "objectionable, vulgarly sensual, and illegal," and that her poems of love were neither "monstrous nor abominable."

The eagerness to come up with "innocent" explanations for the poet's attachment to young women persisted through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The most tenacious theory held that Sappho was the head of a girls' boarding school, a matron whose interest in her pupils was purely pedagogical. (One scholar claimed to have found evidence that classes were taught on how to apply

makeup.) Another theory made her into an august priestess, leading “an association of young women who devoted themselves to the cult of the goddess.”

Classical scholars today have no problem with the idea of a gay Sappho. But some have been challenging the interpretation of her work that seems most natural to twenty-first century readers: that the poems are deeply personal expressions of private homoerotic passion. Pointing to the relentlessly public and communitarian character of ancient-Greek society, with its clan allegiances, its endless rounds of athletic games and artistic competitions, its jammed calendar of civic and religious festivals, they wonder whether “personal” poetry, as we understand the term, even existed for someone like Sappho. As André Lardinois, the co-author of the new English edition, has written, “Can we be sure that these are really her own feelings? . . . What is ‘personality’ in such a group-oriented society as archaic Greece?”

Indeed, the vision of Sappho as a solitary figure pouring out her heart in the women’s quarters of a nobleman’s mansion is a sentimental anachronism—a projection, like so much of our thinking about her, of our own habits and institutions onto the past. In “Sappho and Alcaeus,” by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, a Victorian painter much given to lush re-creations of scenes from Greek antiquity, the Poetess and four diaphanously clad, flower-wreathed acolytes relax in a charming little performance space, enraptured as the male bard sings and plays, as if he were a Beat poet in a Telegraph Hill café. But Lardinois and others have argued that many, if not most, of Sappho’s poems were written to be performed by choruses on public occasions. In some lyrics, the speaker uses the first-person plural “we”; in others, she uses the plural “you” to address a group—presumably the chorus, who danced as she sang. (Even when Sappho uses the first-person singular, it doesn’t mean she was singing solo: in Greek tragedy the chorus, which numbered fifteen singers, regularly uses “I.”)

This communal voice, which to us seems jarring in lyrics of deep, even erotic feeling—imagine that Shake-

speare’s sonnets had been written as choral hymns—is one that some translators today simply ignore, in keeping with the modern interest in individual psychology. But if the proper translation of the sexy little Fragment 38 is not “you scorch me” but “you scorch us,” which is what the Greek actually says, how, exactly, should we interpret it?

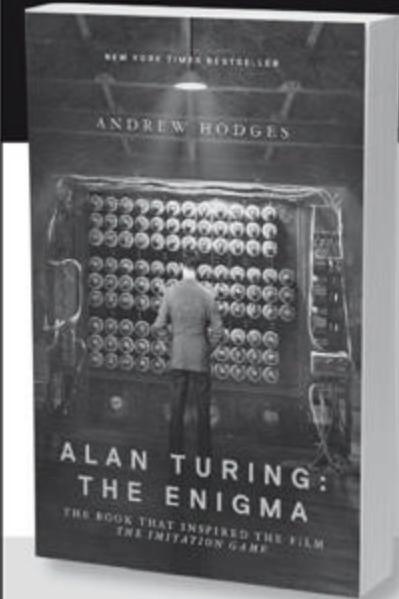
To answer that question, classical scholars lately have been imagining the purposes to which public performance of erotic poems might have been put. Ancient references to the poet’s “companions” and “students” have led one expert to argue that Sappho was the leader of a female collective, whose role was “instruction leading to marriage.” Rather than expressions of individual yearning for a young woman, the poems were, in Lardinois’s view, “public forms of praise of the general attractiveness of the girl,” celebrating her readiness for wedlock and integration into the larger society. The late Harvard classicist Charles Segal made even larger claims. As he saw it, the strongly rhythmic erotic lyrics were “incantatory” in nature; he believed that public performance of poems like Fragment 31 would have served to socialize desire itself for the entire city—to lift sexual yearning “out of the realm of the formless and terrible, bring it into the light of form, make it visible to the individual poet and, by extension, to his or her society.”

Even purely literary issues—for instance, the tendency to think of Sappho as the inventor of “the lyric I,” a single, emotionally naked speaker who becomes a stand-in for the reader—are affected by these new theories. After all, if the “I” who speaks in Sappho’s work is a persona (a “poetic construct rather than a real life figure,” as Lardinois put it) how much does her biography actually matter?

Between the paucity of actual poems and the woeful unreliability of the biographical tradition, these debates are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Indeed, the study of Sappho is beset by a curious circularity. For the better part of a millennium—between the compilation of the *Suda* and the late nineteenth century—the same bits of poetry and the same biographical gossip were endlessly recycled, the poetic fragments providing the sources for

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biographies that were then used as the basis for new interpretations of those same fragments. This is why the “new Sappho” has been so galvanizing for classicists: every now and then, the circle expands, letting in a little more light.

Obbink’s revelation last year was, in fact, only the latest in a series of papyrological discoveries that have dramatically enhanced our understanding of Sappho and her work. Until the late nineteenth century, when the papyri started turning up, there were only the ancient quotations. Since then, the amount of Sappho that we have has more than doubled.

In 1897, two young Oxford archeologists started excavating a site in Egypt that had been the municipal dump of a town called Oxyrhynchus—“the City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish.” In ancient times, the place had been home to a large Greek-speaking population. However lowly its original purpose, the dump soon yielded treasures. Papyrus manuscripts dating to the first few centuries A.D., containing both Greek and Roman texts, began to surface. Some were fragments of works long known, such as the *Iliad*, but even these were of great value, since the Oxyrhynchus papyri were often far older than what had been, until that point, the oldest surviving copies. Others revealed works previously unknown. Among the latter were several exciting new fragments of Sappho, some substantial. From the tattered papyri, the voice came through as distinctive as ever:

Some men say cavalry, some men say infantry,
some men say the navy’s the loveliest thing
on this black earth, but I say it’s whatever you love

Over the decades that followed, more of the papyri were deciphered and published. But by 1955, when the British classicist Denys Page published “Sappho and Alcaeus,” a definitive study of the two Lesbian poets, it seemed that even this rich new vein had been exhausted. “There is not at present,”

Page declared, “any reason to expect that we shall ever possess much more of the poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus than we do today, and this seems a suitable time to begin the difficult and doubtful task of interpreting.”

Sappho herself, it seems fair to say, would have raised an eyebrow at Page’s confidence in his judgment. Human fortune, she writes, is as variable as the weather at sea, where “fair winds swiftly follow harsh gales.” And, indeed, this verse was unknown to Page, since it comes from the papyrus fragment that Dirk Obbink brought to light last year: the “Brothers Poem.”

For specialists, the most exciting feature of the “Brothers Poem” is that it seems to corroborate the closest thing we have to a contemporary reference to Sappho’s personal life: an oblique mention of her in Herodotus’ *Histories*, written about a century and a half after her death. During a long discussion of Egyptian society, Herodotus mentions one of Sappho’s brothers, a rather dashing character named Charaxus. A swashbuckling merchant sailor, he supposedly spent a fortune to buy the freedom of a favorite courtesan in Egypt—an act, Herodotus reports, for which Sappho “severely chided” her sibling in verse. Ovid and other later classical authors also refer to some kind of tension between Sappho and this brother, but, in the absence of a surviving poem on the subject by Sappho herself, generations of scholars were unable to verify even the brother’s name.

So it’s easy to imagine Dirk Obbink’s excitement as he worked his way through the first lines of the poem:

but you’re always nattering on that
Charaxus must come,
his ship full-laden. That much, I reckon,
Zeus knows . . .

The pious thing to do, the speaker says, is to pray to the gods for this brother’s return, since human happiness depends on divine good will. The poem closes with the hope that another, younger brother will grow up honorably and save his family from heartache—presumably, the anxiety caused

by their wayward elder sibling. At last, that particular biographical tidbit could be confirmed.

For non-classicists, the “Brothers Poem” may be less enthralling than the other recent Sappho find, the poem that surfaced in 2004, about old age—a bittersweet work indeed. After the University of Cologne acquired some papyri, scholars found that one of the texts overlapped with a poem already known: Fragment 58, one of the Oxyrhynchus papyri. The Oxyrhynchus fragment consisted mostly of the ends of a handful of lines; the new Cologne papyrus filled in the blanks, leaving only a few words missing. Finally, the lines made sense.

As with much Archaic Greek poetry, the newly restored Fragment 58—the “Old Age Poem,” as it is now called—illustrates its theme with an example from myth. Sappho alludes to the story of Eos, the dawn goddess, who wished for, and was granted, eternal life for her mortal lover, Tithonus, but forgot to ask for eternal youth:

[I bring] the beautiful gifts of the violet
Muses, girls,
and [I love] that song lover, the
sweet-toned lyre.

My skin was [delicate] before, but now
old age
[claims it]; my hair turned from black [to
white].

My spirit has grown heavy; knees buckle
that once could dance light as fawns.

I often groan, but what can I do?
Impossible for humans not to age.

For they say that rosy-armed Dawn in
love
went to the ends of the earth holding
Tithonus,

beautiful and young, but in time gray old
age
seized even him with an immortal wife.

Here as elsewhere in the new translation, Diane J. Rayor captures the distinctively plainspoken quality of Sappho’s Greek, which, for all the poet’s naked emotionality and love of luxe, is never overwrought or baroque. Every translation is a series of sacrifices; in Rayor’s case, emphasis on plainness of expression sometimes comes at the cost of certain formal elements—not least, metre. The classicist M. L. West, who published a translation in the *Times Literary Supplement*, took pains to



emulate the long line of Sappho's original:

But me—my skin which once was soft is
withered now
by age, my hair has turned to white which
once was black . . .

Still, given how disastrously cloying many attempts to re-create Sappho's verse as "song" have proved to be, you're grateful for Rayor's directness. Her notes on the translations are particularly useful, especially when she alerts readers to choices that are left "silent" in other English versions. The last extant line of Fragment 31, for instance, presents a notorious problem: it could mean something like "all must be endured" or, on the other hand, "all must be dared." Rayor prefers "endured," and tells you why she thinks it's the better reading.

In her translation of the "Old Age Poem," Rayor makes one very interesting choice. The Cologne manuscript dates to the third century B.C., which makes it the oldest and therefore presumably the most reliable manuscript of Sappho that we currently possess. In that text, the poem ends after the sixth couplet, with its glum reference to Tithonus being seized by gray old age. But Rayor has decided to include some additional lines that appear only in the fragmentary Oxyrhynchus papyrus. These give the poem a far more upbeat ending:

Yet I love the finer things . . . this and
passion
for the light of life have granted me
brilliance and beauty.

The manuscript containing those lines was copied out five hundred years after the newly discovered version—half a millennium further away from the moment when the Poetess first sang this song.

And so the new Sappho raises as many questions as it answers. Did different versions of a single poem co-exist in antiquity, and, if so, did ancient audiences know or care? Who in the "Brothers Poem" has been chattering on about Sappho's brother Charaxus, and why? Where, exactly, does the "Old Age Poem" end? Was it a melancholy testament to the mortifying effects of age or a triumphant assertion of the power of beauty, of the "finer things"—of poetry itself—to redeem the ravages of time? Even as we strain to hear this remarkable woman's sweet speech, the thrumming in our ears grows louder. ♦

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RESTLESS REALISM

Mario Vargas Llosa's imagined lives.

BY THOMAS MALLON



In the course of Mario Vargas Llosa's seventy-nine years, Peru has alternated between dictatorship and democracy with the sort of regularity that other countries experience through mere shiftings from one political party to another. During his nation's most violent and despairing periods, Vargas Llosa must keenly have felt the truth of his own repeated assertion that the writer of fiction wishes to replace the world as it is with another one entirely.

His novels, the latest of which, "The Discreet Hero" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), appears this month in the United States, have arisen from what Vargas Llosa calls Peru's "effervescent structure

of prejudices and sentiments," the race-based obsession with social hierarchy which has helped produce the country's calamitous political history. His books ignore none of Peru's clashing, kaleidoscopic elements, but his vision, sometimes explicit and more often artistically indirect, is at bottom a gentlemanly, non-millenarian one, desirous of peace and pluralism, secularly hopeful of decency and democratic norms.

Vargas Llosa has filled his books with enough personal refractions to remind one of Alberto Moravia's sense of the novel as "higher autobiography." But if he has a genuine alter ego, an escapist projection of himself, it is the character

Vargas Llosa has a zookeeper's tenderness for the human "fauna" he describes in his fiction.

of Don Rigoberto, introduced, in 1988, in a slender Ovidian tale called "In Praise of the Stepmother" and revived, a decade later, in "The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto" (1997). A Lima insurance executive by day, Rigoberto is by night a "libertarian hedonist," enveloped in books and music and baroque sexual activity with his voluptuous second wife, Doña Lucrecia. He dictates her hairdressing and her jewelry, then orchestrates their erotic role-play with highbrow connoisseurship, directing Lucrecia to play figures painted by Titian and Boucher and Jordaens. Told in comically overdone prose ("We will take our pleasure in that half twilight that already is raping the night"), the couple's adventures are enhanced by a comely housemaid named Justiniana and threatened by Don Rigoberto's pre-adolescent and highly sexualized son, Fonchito, a cross between Tadzio and Lucifer whom his stepmother can't resist.

In Don Rigoberto's view, all things should lead to sex and "sovereignty," a "horrendous glory" from which all civic responsibility disappears in favor of a fetish-fed "expression of human particularity." In its mannered explicitness, "In Praise of the Stepmother" feels like something one prints privately and gives to a lover. For Vargas Llosa, it may have been a personal getaway, the release of an imaginative safety valve when he most needed it. As he readied the book for publication, a couple of years past his fiftieth birthday, he was preparing to run for the Presidency of Peru.

Vargas Llosa was born in 1936, in the southern city of Arequipa. He spent his early years being happily indulged by his mother's family, the Llosas, after she was deserted by her struggling and sometimes violent husband, Ernesto Vargas. (Mario was allowed to believe that his father had died.) According to the author's memoir, "A Fish in the Water" (1993), the Llosas "had been well-off and possessed of aristocratic airs" before a gentle descent into the middle class. His grandfather was related to José Luis Bustamante y Rivero, the Peruvian President who was ousted in a military coup by General Manuel Odría in 1948.

After a "secret reconciliation" with

his wife, Ernesto Vargas reentered his son's life when Mario was eleven. "The nightmare of my childhood" began at that point, the author later recalled. Ernesto limited Mario's contact with the Llosas (he resented their "airs" and their pampering of his son), and subjected him to verbal abuse and beatings. Eventually, Mario was sent to a military academy in Lima. The school provided the setting for Vargas Llosa's first novel, "The Time of the Hero" (1962), the story of cadets who demonstrate all manner of gross, and even murderous, cruelty. For years, legend had it that, upon publication, a thousand copies had been burned on the academy grounds.

As a university student in the mid-nineteen-fifties, during the Odría dictatorship, Vargas Llosa made secret forays into political activity, joining a cell of Communists and contributing to an underground Marxist journal on "international subjects from the 'proletarian' and 'dialectical' point of view." This mind-set helped make him a devotee of Gabriel García Márquez, about whom he published a lengthy book in 1971, and of Fidel Castro, but neither of these enthusiasms would survive the nineteen-seventies. The first ended with the Peruvian writer giving the Colombian a black eye. (The two of them made a pact never to speak of what provoked Vargas Llosa's punch, though one popular theory suggests that García Márquez slept with his acolyte's wife.) The attraction to Castro, whom Vargas Llosa had seen as a "romantic guerrilla leader," turned into implacable moral opposition, a view of the dictator as "a little satrap with bloodstained hands."

Vargas Llosa passed much of Latin America's literary "Boom"—the years that made writers like García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes more than hemispherically famous—in Europe, teaching, translating, working in broadcast journalism, and publishing novel after novel. His literary predilections were, in great measure, European and North American, and, while he tried out some of the same narrative experiments as other Boom writers, his defection from the left made him a political outlier. Spain became his second, adopted homeland; years later, recalling its emergence from Francoism, he spoke of his discovery that "when good sense and

reason prevail and political adversaries set aside sectarianism for the common good, events can occur as marvelous as the ones in the novels of magic realism." He came to cherish incrementalism, and to view the history of his own country through a democratic, reformist lens. In an essay called "Fiction and Reality in Latin America," he discerned even in the conquest of the Incas a message more anti-dictatorial than anti-imperialist: "The vertical and totalitarian structure of the Tahuantinsuyu was, without doubt, more of a threat to its survival than all the conquistadors' firearms and iron weapons."

During the nineteen-eighties, Peru began to crumble from corruption, drug violence, and terror attacks by the Maoist Shining Path movement. In "The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta" (1984), a novel set a few years into the future, the narrator declares, "Since it is impossible to know what's really happening, we Peruvians lie, invent, dream, and take refuge in illusion.... Peruvian life, a life in which so few actually do read, has become literary." And yet it was at this moment that Vargas Llosa slowed his prodigious literary output and allowed himself to catch the "disease" of practical politics. "A Fish in the Water" chronicles his role in forming the Democratic Front, the party that ran him for President in 1990. Vargas Llosa saw the threat of totalitarianism in the rigid state-driven economy and the nationalizations imposed by the ruling American Popular Revolutionary Alliance. He instead proposed a "radical liberalism," an array of free-market reforms, and a revitalization of civil liberties.

The campaign was chaotic and thrilling. The novelist fended off lies about his finances, threats to his life, and attacks on the supposed depravity of his books: "In Praise of the Stepmother" was read, one chapter per day, during prime time on government-run television. Slender and elegant, the author-candidate looked more patrician than he actually was, and couldn't overcome a cool, Kennedyesque refusal to be carried on his supporters' shoulders, "a ridiculous custom of Peruvian politicians in imitation of bullfighters." Vargas Llosa was asking to lead a nation that he was beginning to recognize as "not one country, but several, living together in mu-

tual mistrust and ignorance, in resentment and prejudice, and in a maelstrom of violence."

On the verge of becoming as famous an artist-politician as Václav Havel, Vargas Llosa managed to finish first in the initial round of balloting, only to lose the second, badly, to Alberto Fujimori, an agricultural engineer of Japanese ancestry, who came so quickly out of nowhere—promising "Honesty, Technology and Work"—that his advent, too, seemed more "literary" than political. During the next decade, Fujimori delivered a species of economic reform, but he brought with it a nonmilitary dictatorship, shutting down Peru's congress and gutting its courts. When Vargas Llosa called for international action against him, the novelist was threatened with the loss of his citizenship.

Mad Peru hurt Vargas Llosa into fiction long before it pushed him toward politics. In fact, his pursuit of the first probably assured his failure at the second, since, as he himself has argued, "good literature always ends up showing those who read it . . . the inevitable limitation of all power to fulfill human aspirations and desires."

From its beginnings, the novel has been the most democratic and bourgeois of all art forms; it has almost always failed in the service of programmatic politics, let alone totalitarianism, because it grows from what Vargas Llosa calls, in his memoir, the "sordid warp and woof of which daily life is woven for the majority of mortals." In a primer on writing with the Rilkean title "Letters to a Young Novelist" (1997), Vargas Llosa describes the composition of fiction as a "backwards striptease," in which an author puts imaginative garments onto the naked autobiographical basis of his every production. What he has typically done in his own work is not to make the personal political but—even before his apostasy from the left—to render the political personal, shrinking it down to human size by inserting an analogue of himself into the commotion of public events.

"Conversation in the Cathedral" (1969), one of Vargas Llosa's important early books, features Santiago Zavala, a feckless, more passive version of the author in his youth. (Like his protagonist,



"In America, the streets are paved with gold. And everything else is stuffed with cheese and bacon."

• •

the teen-age Vargas Llosa worked for the Lima newspaper *La Crónica*.) Santiago's Peru is "all fucked up," yet it is still, he tells us, "my Peru," not an abstract body politic but a welter of small disasters and compromises. The "Cathedral" of the novel's title refers to the dive bar in which Santiago has a long session of reminiscence with Ambrosio Pardo, a black man at the bottom of Peña's racial pyramid, who has served as a chauffeur to both Santiago's father and Cayo Bermúdez, a fictional version of the Odría regime's security director. As the book leaps from subject to subject—a failed coup attempt; the adventures of Bermúdez's lesbian mistress; the secret homosexual life of Santiago's father; the murder of a radio singer and carnival queen—Santiago realizes what *La Crónica*'s Weegee-like crime reporter already knows: there "weren't any pure people in the world." Humans, to him, are just another type of "fauna," a word that Vargas Llosa went on to use in novel after novel, not with detachment or revulsion but, rather, with a sort of zookeeper's tenderness for his charges.

Despite continual manipulations of

structure and narrative, this great writer of fiction has never been a great formalist. Much of his first novel, about the military academy, is given over to Joycean streams of recitation, the boys' resentments rippling over one another. Its characters end up seeming like a chorus without a cast, and the book obligated more to technique than to the moral inquiry that generated it. The tremendous vividness of "Conversation in the Cathedral" has to be similarly glimpsed in flashes, amid the narrative's almost constant chronological shuffle. The novel is driven, and sometimes strangled, by a technique that the young Vargas Llosa developed partly through the influence of what he has called the "communicating vessels" of "Madame Bovary" and Faulkner's "The Wild Palms": the braiding of multiple episodes, or, in Vargas Llosa's case, dialogues, on the same page, an alternation designed to squeeze in as much irony and resonance as the contrasting materials can produce. The effects are often more soupy than symphonic, but Vargas Llosa has compulsively retained the method, to the point of its becoming a trademark.

Vargas Llosa's truest gifts have operated when he's given in to what he has called, in his memoir's doubly apologetic phrasing, "an invincible weakness for so-called realism." A youthful uncertainty about his stature relative to both the magical realists and the earlier modernists—who, like Virginia Woolf, decried reality's "cheapness"—lingered, though by the time he won the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 2010, he was willing to acknowledge that "scope and ambition are as important in a novel as stylistic dexterity and narrative strategy." Before he could make such a declaration, however, he had a series of literary shadows to step out of. Called "the fierce little Sartrean" during his youth ("I thought, very naïvely, that serious literature never smiled," he has said), he worked hard to shed the lugubriousness that had earned him the nickname.

One result was "Captain Pantoja and the Special Service" (1973), an absurdist comedy set just after the Odría years, and another novel that was used against Vargas Llosa during the Presidential campaign. The dutiful Pantoja is assigned to set up a military brothel that the brass hope will reduce sexual assaults by Peruvian soldiers serving in the Amazon region, an effort that leads him to new heights of lust and self-respect as the ever-expanding operation becomes "the most efficient unit of the armed forces." The author can't resist pouring some of his dialogues through his "communicating vessels," but it is usually a more graphic and exuberant exchange of fluids that the novel takes for its business.

The same high comedy is on display in "Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter" (1977), Vargas Llosa's fullest fictional reconstruction of his Lima youth. Its protagonist, Mario, goes to work at Radio Panamericana (the hustling Vargas Llosa did that, too), where he comes under the spell of Pedro Camacho, "the Balzac of Peru," the prodigious author of the station's soap operas. From Camacho, Mario learns to let "contrast, not continuity, be the ruling principle of composition: the complete change of place, milieu, mood, subject, and characters." Though this may sound like the equivalent of Vargas Llosa's own alternations and narrative shifts—the station manager objects to Camacho's

“modernist gimmicks”—Camacho’s transitions are a matter not of painstaking design but of manic, uncontrollable movement, suggestive of the whirligig that art, life, and the subconscious all ride together.

“Aunt Julia” is a silly, first-rate book, capacious enough to make room even for some touches of magical realism: Camacho’s suitcase could no more hold all the acting costumes that are said to be in it than the single valise in García Márquez’s “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” could contain nearly two thousand unopened love letters. As the novel quickens and builds, the soap-opera plots get tangled. The pharmaceutical salesman who had the road accident morphs into the *pensión* owner stabbed by a crazy boarder, before presenting himself as a potential husband for the woman who began carrying her brother’s child many episodes before. Like Vargas Llosa, Mario weds the much older, juicy, and brash sister-in-law of his uncle. (Vargas Llosa’s more enduring second marriage was to a cousin.) Camacho’s inability to unsnarl the threads of his soap operas mirrors Vargas Llosa’s admission, decades later, that he can no longer distinguish “memories and flights of fancy” in the details of Mario’s autobiographical story line.

As a young man, Vargas Llosa thought of becoming a historian, and he developed a colorful, Carlylean sense of the field’s possibilities. Even after he committed himself to fiction, the desire to find a deep-seated cultural explanation for Peru’s political failures periodically drove him into the country’s past. In “The Dream of the Celt” (2010), he imagined the early-twentieth-century investigation by the British consul Roger Casement into the atrocities committed by the Peruvian Amazon Company’s “rubber barons” against indigenous laborers. The novel also follows Casement, an Irish nationalist, as he is vilified for the homosexual encounters described in his journals and eventually executed for treason. The material is rich, but the conundrums particular to historical fiction here trip up the novelist. “The Dream of the Celt” was so arduously researched that it reads almost entirely like nonfiction, with dialogue stilted by

exposition and a detached point of view that keeps Casement’s tumultuous inner life at an oddly chilly remove.

A few decades before the Boom, Peru’s Indigenista movement sought to locate the country’s literary identity in tribal lore and native legends. Though leery of the “demagoguery and aestheticism” that sentimental primitivism can engender, Vargas Llosa nonetheless tried coming to terms with the movement’s legacy in “The Storyteller” (1987). The book’s narrator goes off in search of a friend from university days, an ethnologist who has deliberately lost himself inside the Machiguenga tribe along the Amazon. “This, too, was Peru,” the narrator says, “a world still untamed, the Stone Age, magico-religious cultures, polygamy, head-shrinking . . . that is to say, the dawn of human history.” Vargas Llosa blends his quest with tales from the *hablador*, or tribal storyteller, that his friend has become, immersing the reader in a wearying flow of creation stories, conversations with fireflies, and fabulist factoids: “When you cook a talking monkey, the air is filled with the smell of tobacco, they say.”

Vargas Llosa’s more striking encounters with politics and history have come when, looking for material, he has left Peru. He found his most consuming subject for historical fiction over the Brazilian border, in the eighteen-nineties Canudos insurrection. Under the sway of a magnetic preacher known

is a horrifying epic of castration, rape, gangrene, and vultures—the brutal and pointless suppression of a harum-scarum utopia peopled with ex-slaves, healers, outlaws, peddlers, and pilgrims.

One might expect Vargas Llosa to identify with the cultured, skeptical baron whose hacienda is torched during the conflict, and who sees politics as “an inane, depressing occupation.” But his surrogate turns out to be a “near-sighted journalist,” who, during the mayhem, lets himself be galvanized from timid chronicler to ecstatic adherent. The novelist does much the same. Moments of the book are madly compelling—unlike “The Storyteller” or the Casement novel, it feels driven by obsession, not obligation—but the allegorical dimension that Vargas Llosa hoped for (“We have a living Canudos in the Andes,” he pointed out, with the Shining Path in mind) is never clearly focussed; the material is too religious and outré, and the writer’s ability to give his heart to the rebellion isn’t an expression of his democratic stance but a vacation from it.

Another twenty years passed before Vargas Llosa found his way to his political masterpiece, “The Feast of the Goat” (2000), a blazing re-creation of the 1961 assassination that put an end to Rafael Trujillo’s three-decade rule in the Dominican Republic. Avoiding the biographical trap of his Casement book, he focusses as much on Trujillo’s henchmen, sycophants, and assassins as on the strongman himself, who is richly bedevilled by the Church, his prostate, and the advent of John F. Kennedy. Parts of the novel are realized with the specificity of a roman à clef—the dictator’s most reliable and physically repulsive flunky, a man whose multiple offices and vile manners are rendered in squalidly funny Homeric catalogues, is said to be based on a Fujimora-era Peruvian congressman. Yet it achieves its grandeur through the fictional Urania Cabral, a woman who returns to Santo Domingo decades after her father, an official seeking to recover from a temporary loss of favor, pimped her out to the dictator. Emotionally cauterized by the experience, she reappears in middle age to confront her dying parent. She recalls the night of her



as the Counselor, a band of rebels in the state of Bahia had defied the new Brazilian federal republic to form a breakaway state that abolished property and championed both free love and religious devotion. It took the republic four savage military expeditions before the settlement at Canudos—today an artificial lake—was wiped out. Vargas Llosa’s rendition of this episode, in “The War of the End of the World” (1981), his longest book and his personal favorite,

proffering, when Trujillo recited Neruda's poetry and poured out his troubles:

She tried not to look at his body, but sometimes her eyes moved along his soft belly, white pubis, small, dead sex, hairless legs. This was the Generalissimo, the Benefactor of the Nation, the Father of the New Nation, the Restorer of Financial Independence. The Chief whom Papa had served for thirty years with devotion and loyalty, and presented with a most delicate gift: his fourteen-year-old daughter.

"The Feast of the Goat" operates in a way that is more personal than panoramic; it remains intimate and local, a character-driven tale instead of a conscious historical enterprise, and in so doing it becomes the first great political novel of the twenty-first century.

For nearly sixty years, Vargas Llosa has been welcoming a character called Lituma, a police sergeant from the city of Piura, into his immense, restless œuvre. He first appears in "A Visitor," a short story from the mid-nineteen-fifties, tying up a suspect and observing that he doesn't think it will rain. He shows up more fully in Vargas Llosa's second novel, "The Green House" (1965), where we learn of his youthful stretch in jail; of how his wife became a prostitute; and of how he once foolishly started a game of Russian roulette. Even so, the Sergeant Lituma who endures over decades in book after book is mostly a malleable, decent Everyman, a mixed-race *cholo* stuck in the middle of Peru's race arrangements, a good-natured grunt with whom Vargas Llosa has little autobiographical kinship but about whom he was almost certainly thinking in 1990, as he appealed to voters by the million.

In "Who Killed Palomino Molero?" (1986), a brief detective novel set in the fifties, Lituma works a case with a Lieutenant Silva; he suffers nightmares, worries that he's too fearful for the work he's doing, and begins feeling a need to understand evil. He rises to eponymous status only once, in 1993, in "Lituma en los Andes" (published in English as "Death in the Andes"), a novel in which Vargas Llosa makes him endure a hazardous posting in a former mining town now beset by the murders and kidnappings of the Shining Path. Lituma may have transgressed since he was last seen by the reader—he's only a corporal

here—but his heart retains an elemental decency. Homesick for Piura, prone to falling in love with hookers, he asuges his loneliness and lust by listening to the erotic adventures of his deputy. He waits to be killed or kidnapped himself, and wonders, as did more sophisticated people in the same period, whether only magic can explain the violence around him.

It is hard to imagine Vargas Llosa's new novel without Lituma. Although it contains up-to-the-minute references to Justin Bieber and social media, "The Discreet Hero" feels retrospective in a personal and perhaps valedictory way, a fulfillment of themes and characters that have populated his work for decades. Much of it is set in Lituma's Piura, now a fast-developing and prosperous city. The sergeant is said to have a double chin and to be "close to fifty now"—never mind that a less novelistic math would put him nearer to a hundred. Living alone in a boarding house, he is poor, in part, because he is fundamentally honest: he has never taken a bribe, even though, in these post-Fujimori years, the country is awash in venality, beset by kidnappings that are no longer political but, rather, the means by which to make a bigger financial killing. Lituma blames things on all the money coming over the border from Ecuador and sighs about the supposed "price of progress."

"The Discreet Hero," an energetic book with a more straightforward narrative method than almost any other Vargas Llosa novel, centers on an extortion plot against the self-made owner of a local transport company, a good man who refuses to pay, and whose son and mistress may be in on the crime. It also brings the return of Don Rigoberto, the irresponsible aesthete through whom Vargas Llosa mentally dodged some of the worst of the Peruvian eighties. Still bemoaning the "barbarism" of the country beneath his window, Rigoberto is now sixty-two and ready to retire from the insurance company. His son, Fonchito, however, is maturing with the same magic-realist slowness as Lituma: he should be easily past thirty but is still no more than fifteen, driving Don Rigoberto and Doña Lucrecia to distraction with tales of an older man who keeps mysteriously appearing to him. The parents finally put their doubts about his

story into the hands of a private eye and a shrink; the possibility is even raised that this precocious sexual manipulator may have had a spiritual experience and become an angel.

"The Discreet Hero" is most memorable for its optimism (Silva, for whom Lituma still works, cracks his case), and for the way in which Don Rigoberto is forced away from his etchings and phonograph records and into the "sordid warp and woof" of the world he has scorned. "My God," he thinks, "what stories ordinary life devised; not masterpieces to be sure, they were doubtless closer to Venezuelan, Brazilian, Colombian, and Mexican soap operas than to Cervantes and Tolstoy. But then again not so far from Alexandre Dumas, Émile Zola, Charles Dickens, or Bérito Pérez Galdós." He even seems willing to accept the happy ending that Vargas Llosa offers, one that invites this old refectionist to remain, like the author, a fish in the water. As his family takes off on a trip, Don Rigoberto feels "reconciled with his son, with life. They had risen above the cloud cover and a radiant sun lit the interior of the plane."

Vargas Llosa has said that his first childhood compositions were continuations of things he had read. As he approaches eighty, his works are the extension of things he has already written. He remains fundamentally true to his earthy, non-utopian vision: what lies below Don Rigoberto's sun-filled plane is what the author long ago accepted as an ideal of imperfection, a world "made up of relative truths, in permanent dialogue," always in medias res and never looking for the revolutionist's Year Zero.

The new book is actually the only one in whose title Vargas Llosa has ever put the word "hero." (His first novel may have reached English-language readers as "The Time of the Hero," but in Spanish it was "La Ciudad y Los Perros"—"The City and the Dogs.") A "discreet hero"—in this novel, the ordinary businessman resisting illegality—borders on being a literary contradiction, someone insufficiently larger than life, but such a figure is the essential component of a modest, meliorist dream, one Vargas Llosa has sustained in times even darker than the present by noting that "a novel is something, while despair is nothing." ♦

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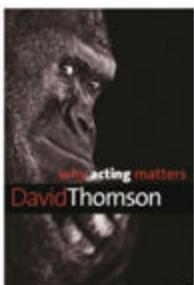
SATIN ISLAND, by Tom McCarthy (*Knopf*). This experimental novel takes the form of a brilliant series of numbered digressions on parachute accidents, Lévi-Strauss, hub airports, and many other things. The narrator, who calls himself U., is an anthropologist working for the “Company” on something called the Koob-Sassen Project. The project’s goals are oblique, but its influence, we are told, is all-pervasive. U.’s job is to draw connections, and he does so with frenzied panache; an imagined presentation on oil spills concludes, “Is not the flow of oil the flow of time itself: slowly but inevitably crawling, in a series of identical, repeating pulses, to some final shoreline?” If the novel ultimately feels like a bravura display of empty rhetoric, who’s to say that’s not precisely the point?



ALL DAYS ARE NIGHT, by Peter Stamm, translated from the German by Michael Hofmann (*Other Press*). In this engrossing story of recovery, the host of a TV arts show wakes up in the hospital after a car accident. Her husband is dead, and she is disfigured. With a feeling of “weightlessness,” she goes over her life before the crash: her marriage, her career, her entanglement with an artist named Hubert. As she prepares for reconstructive surgery, she wonders, “What’s left of me?” It’s a version of a question that has long troubled her. She’d hoped, when Hubert made images of her, “to be told something about myself.” Stamm switches between her viewpoint and his, as their experiences of art and disaster start to overlap.



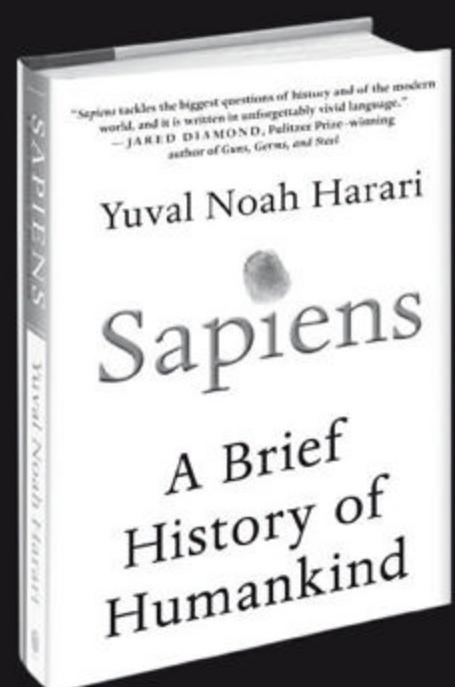
MR. AND MRS. DISRAELI, by Daisy Hay (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). This intricate history takes aim at myths surrounding Benjamin Disraeli, the Victorian Prime Minister and novelist, and his wife, Mary Anne Lewis. From the start, their marriage provoked extreme reactions. She was a wealthy widow; he was Jewish, twelve years her junior, and mired in debt. Rumors of homosexuality (his) and desperation (hers), together with their often theatrical displays of affection, helped create an uncommonly gossipy historical record. Disraeli’s own mythmaking didn’t help. In numerous speeches, he romanticized Mary Anne, turning her into an ideal of womanhood. Hay reveals a reality both less sensational and more interesting: the Disraelis squabbled frequently, but their affection, if showy, was genuine.



WHY ACTING MATTERS, by David Thomson (*Yale*). In this consideration of the actor’s craft, a noted film historian anatomizes favorite performances and speculates on ones that might have been (such as a Philip Seymour Hoffman Hamlet). Thomson demonstrates a subtle understanding of the mind-set of the actor, adept at storytelling, spying, lying, and secrecy. The ardent nature of Thomson’s fandom often turns this extended essay into hagiographies of Marlon Brando and Laurence Olivier, but he always returns to a central point: our lives are filled with repetition as we play the same roles day after day, but watching an extraordinary actor perform lets us imagine that another life is possible.

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Pulitzer Prize-winning author of
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LADY AND THE TRAMP

Helen Mirren and Larry David on Broadway.

BY HILTON ALS

To watch Larry David make his Broadway début, in his self-penned “Fish in the Dark” (at the Cort), in the same week that Helen Mirren stars as Queen Elizabeth II, in Peter Morgan’s “The Audience” (at the Gerald Schoenfeld), is to learn something about the benefits and the limitations of shtick. Derived from the Yiddish word *shtik*, meaning “an act” or “a gimmick” (from the German *Stück*, for “piece”), it can also refer to an adopted persona that is consistently maintained. David’s shtick is familiar to legions of fans of his HBO show “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” in which he played a thin, sour-voiced TV writer and producer. Mirren’s shtick, on the other hand, is to transform herself into what she is not: in this case, Elizabeth II, a role she first took on in the 2006 movie “The Queen” (also written by Morgan), for which she won the Best Actress Academy Award. Mirren’s goal is not to reënact but to interpret; she has spent a considerable amount of time grappling with this real-life figure, and looking at the divide between what a famous woman is perceived to be and what she actually is—if she manages to hold on to some version of *that*.

It would be a mistake to walk into the Schoenfeld—or any other space where a so-called “historical drama” is playing these days—and expect a literal transcription of life. Veracity does not make excellent stage work; imagination and extrapolation do. Years ago, Broadway audiences flocked to melodramas like Rudolf Besier’s “The Barretts of Wimpole Street” (1931) or Henry Denker’s “A Far Country” (1961) less because they wanted

to know the chronology of the lives of Robert Browning and Sigmund Freud than because they wanted a window into those famous souls, through which the view would, inevitably, be romantic: didn’t famous people live bigger, starrier lives than the rest of us? Many contemporary theatre artists have a similar romantic view but temper or critique it by apply-



Mirren plays Queen Elizabeth II in “The Audience.”

ing it to anti-romantic characters—people we are fascinated by, but who can, at times, make our flesh crawl. Morgan borrows extensively from history—the TV interviewer David Frost’s notorious encounters with Richard Nixon were the basis of his 2006 smash, “Frost/Nixon,” for instance—to write stage and film essays about fame, sometimes featuring

characters who represent ruin in the world (such as the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, who figures so lushly and cruelly in the 2006 film Morgan co-wrote, “The Last King of Scotland”).

Morgan’s celebrities do double duty: they act out the complications of being human while coping, or not coping, with the public responsibility of fame—of inhabiting a narrative that the whole world reads and dumps its ideas into. While his English predecessor that genius scenarist Dennis Potter described the effect of fantasy on ordinary life, Morgan, a rational surrealist—his pacing recalls Buñuel’s late films—likes to burrow into the only thing that can remain obscure in a universe of the known: feelings. But what are feelings if they’re inseparable from rumor or gossip? Morgan suggests that the famous have to fight for the right to be “nobody,” in Emily Dickinson’s sense of the word (“How dreary to be somebody!/How public, like a frog/To tell your name the livelong day/To an admiring bog!”).

Queen Elizabeth’s personal equerry (the very fine Geoffrey Beevers) may be a nobody beside the woman he serves, but it’s his access to her fame and power that accounts for at least part of his stiff-backed, pissy hauteur. In black boots, jacket, and sash, he walks to center stage and addresses the audience:

Every week the Queen of the United Kingdom has a private audience with her Prime Minister. The meeting takes place in the Private Audience Room located on the first floor of Buckingham Palace. A large, duck-egg-blue room. High ceilings, a fireplace, a Chippendale bureau. Four gilt-framed paintings, two by Canaletto, two by Gainsborough. At the center of the room, two chairs made by François Hervé, acquired in 1826. Their original color was burgundy, but Queen Mary had them re-upholstered in more optimistic yellow Dupioni silk. . . . According to household records, they were last re-upholstered . . . just in time for an audience with Her Majesty’s ninth Prime Minister, on the 17th January, 1995.

The director of “The Audience,” Stephen Daldry, knows that facts are essential to our understanding of myth.

Working closely with Morgan's long and essentially plotless script—during the course of the play, Elizabeth meets with eight of the Prime Ministers whose terms have coincided with her reign—he not only shows us how the scene is assembled but makes its construction part of his theatre magic, which is warmer than Brecht's, but "alienated," too. As the equerry talks, we see footmen position the chairs in a sort of Christian Bérard-influenced half-world. (Daldry is aided in the creation of his splendid world of illusions by the designer Bob Crowley and the lighting designer Rick Fisher.)

The first Prime Minister to visit Her Majesty is the Conservative John Major (a slightly frantic Dylan Baker), who is trying to turn the British economy around. As the two take their seats, Elizabeth sighs, her face a mask of weary tolerance. The conversation begins in absurdity:

MAJOR: I only ever wanted to be ordinary.
A silence. *The Queen* stares.

ELIZABETH: And in which way do you consider you've failed in that ambition?

MAJOR: What's going on in my political life at the moment is just so EXTRAordinary. My government is tearing itself apart. . . . And now Margaret sniping at me all the time from the wings. Claiming I am betraying her legacy. . . . We're just all caught up in a transition that none of us yet fully understands. And the papers are being so AWFUL. . . .

ELIZABETH: It's a dangerous business reading newspapers. . . .

MAJOR: I know. I just can't help myself. Can't walk past one of the things without picking it up, hoping for a lift. And then I get crushed when they're so . . . VILE. Most of my political life it was fine because I was generously overlooked. . . . Did you know eighteen months before I became Prime Minister just two per cent of the country had even heard of me? . . . When I walk into a room, heads fail to turn.

ELIZABETH: (*sighs*) How lovely. . . .

Obscurity may be a dream of Elizabeth's, but she knows that it's just that—a dream, which must be set aside in order for her to deal with the realities of her role as, she jokes, "a postage stamp with a pulse."

There is nothing like watching a great director with a great star; the relationship can and often does transcend weak material. Morgan's material is not lacklustre. There's enough air in it for Mirren to interpret, and for Daldry to guide her interpretation and add an element that only the stage can contain: camp. (This is especially true when Elizabeth recounts the story of her coronation: she is aglitter with her own celestial light.) What artist who survived the

Thatcher years—the vast divide between the haves and the have-nots, the racism, the willful ignorance about AIDS—can take royalty, let alone politics, to heart? Daldry and Mirren don't ridicule Elizabeth II; they ridicule her job and its endless mundanities, while focussing on the moments when she sneaks out from behind the discipline, the steely hair, the perfunctory half-smile. Elizabeth behaves like a lady (legs crossed at the ankle, handbag at the ready), even as she refuses to perceive her gender as a limitation:

ELIZABETH: At least you HAD a formal education. I wasn't that lucky. . . .

MAJOR: I'm curious. Was that because you were . . . female?

ELIZABETH: You're ahead of me, Prime Minister. I was banking on the idea that I still AM.

MAJOR: I meant the home education.

ELIZABETH: You mean had my sister and I been boys, would we have been sent to boarding school? Probably.

MAJOR: So you were victims of gender discrimination?

ELIZABETH: I suppose we were. Do you think I should sue?

Mirren is not a coquettish queen, but she is a sexy one, because she is so controlled, and such a good comedienne behind her cardigan, her sensible shoes, and her pearls. She won't let Elizabeth's pale public persona neuter her, and she uses her impassive stare, sometimes, the way a dominatrix might when looking at a tiresome client. Must she whip him again? For Elizabeth, that would be about as exciting as brushing that piece of lint off her skirt.

Judith Ivey's Thatcher could do with a bit of that control. She's so anxious to define herself in opposition to the Queen—as the country lass resentful of privilege—that you can barely make out what she's saying behind the prosthetic teeth. Still, you can see the chip on her shoulder. She's desperate for the Queen's attention, and resentful of her shopgirl's need. The Queen understands that her Prime Ministers are aspirants. They don't want to be royals, but they want to be royally treated. Morgan's play is as much a treatise on class resentment as anything else, and Daldry knows that each of these characters is both more and less than human, representative of an aspect of life, rather than life itself.

But for a show-business figure like Larry David is there a difference? His dyspeptic humor is, as far as I can make out, most closely related to W. C. Fields's anti-utopian view of the world.

But there was a heart—a very real heart—in Fields's best work, most of which took place in silence. The perennially modern Louise Brooks understood that Fields's art was based on rejection. "As a young man, he stretched out his hand to Beauty and Love and they thrust it away," she wrote. David stomps on Beauty and Love to the great delight of people who are too passive or polite to do it themselves. He's not an anarchist in the Lenny Bruce mode, or a confused humanist, like Louis C.K. Instead, he preaches hatred through self-hatred, a strident "Jewish" minstrelsy.

The comedy in "Fish in the Dark," such as it is, has to do with family. We meet Norman (David) in a Los Angeles hospital, where his father, Sidney (Jerry Adler), is dying; family members, including Norman, his brother Arthur (Ben Shenkman), and their mother, Gloria (Jayne Houdyshell), are taking turns at Sidney's bedside. Soon, the secrets and revelations come crowding in, including the fact that the family maid, Fabiana (Rosie Perez), has borne Sidney's child, Diego (Jake Canavale). After the funeral, Norman and his brother argue over who should take care of their nag of a mother. In a bid to get her out of his house, Norman cooks up a scheme with Fabiana: Diego will go to Gloria as the ghost of Sidney's younger self (he resembles the father he never knew) and persuade her to move in with Arthur.

Norman is a greedy, self-interested schlemiel, not unlike the one David played on "Curb Your Enthusiasm"—a stereotype of loathing, who views everything through the lens of his own vindictive cowardice. The director, Anna D. Shapiro, moves bodies around the stage with little visible evidence that she's concerned about their inner lives, and rarely steps outside the Broadway machinery to reenvision the dreck she's stuck with. (She staged last year's poor revival of "Of Mice and Men.") And still I can't help wondering how she was able to reconcile herself to this script, with its cynical manipulation of sentimentality and humor, where even Grandma is craven, and it's standard for a man to use the word "cunt" to describe a woman—and then use it again, for laughs, in his apology, as the woman, stuck in her conventional wife-shtick, looks on, disbelieving and silent. ♦

MOVING PICTURES

Plains Indian art at the Metropolitan Museum.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



"The Grand Robe" (circa 1800–30), made by an artist from a Central Plains tribe.

It began with horses and ended in massacre. The zenith of the cultures that are celebrated in "The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky," a wondrous show at the Metropolitan Museum, lasted barely two hundred years. It started in 1680, when Pueblo Indians seized the steeds of Spanish settlers whom they had driven out of what is now New Mexico. The horse turned the scores of Plains tribes—river-valley farmers and hunter-gatherers who had used dogs as their beasts of burden—into a vast aggregate of mounted nomads, who ranged from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and from the Rio Grande into Canada, hunting buffalo, trading, and warring with one another. The era ended with the killing of more than two hundred Lakota men, women, and children by federal troops at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890. Meanwhile, epidemic smallpox and other alien diseases took a toll far beyond that of military violence. The official census of 1900 found only a quarter of

a million Native Americans in the entire United States. What ensued is a story of reservations—including the immaterial sort, which trouble the mind. But there's an ameliorating epilogue of revivals and transformations of Plains heritage.

The show, of some hundred and fifty artifacts, curated by Gaylord Torrence (and coördinated by Judith Ostrowitz), is the most comprehensive of its kind. It began at the Musée du Quai Branly, in Paris, whose collaboration accounts for many of the earliest items on view. French explorers, missionaries, and traders were the first whites to encounter Plains Indians, in territory that France ceded to the United States only in 1803, with the Louisiana Purchase. (Lewis and Clark set out the next year.) The first seven of twenty superb items that are dated 1700–1820 come from the Branly. The most astounding is "Robe with Mythic Bird" (1700–40), from an unknown tribe of the Eastern Plains: a tanned buffalo hide pigmented with a

spiky abstraction, probably of a thunderbird, in red and black, which rivals the most exciting modern art. (Squint at it, and it can suggest the innovation of an artist versed in but impatient with the aesthetic conventions of Art Deco.) Other robes introduce a pictographic tradition, recording events in personal and tribal history, which climaxes with riveting late-nineteenth-century drawings of violent combat with soldiers, made in a ledger book (a common source of paper for Plains tribes at the time), by anonymous Northern and Southern Cheyenne artists.

Except for a few ancient relics—the oldest a pipe in human form, from two millennia ago, which was found in Ohio—even the earliest works in the show evince contact with whites. Glass beads, acquired in trade, became a staple of Plains Indian decorative artistry. Beadwork, metal cones, and cotton and silk cloth figure in a headdress from the Eastern Plains, circa 1780, along with local stuffs including bison horns, deer and horse hair, and porcupine quills. (The formal integration of so many elements into a shapely accoutrement of authority smacks of genius.) A menacing steel blade protrudes from a gracefully curved and tapered wooden war club, circa 1800–20, which its Eastern Plains owner inscribed with a log of his conquests: pictures of seven people, all but one of whom lack heads. A boldly designed Comanche bridle, circa 1860, makes use of German silver, an alloy of copper, nickel, and zinc. The Plains tribes' adaptation of European materials devolved, by the end of the nineteenth century, into cottage-industrial crafts for collectors and gift-shop markets. (But some of those, to this day, are aesthetically marvellous.)

Just about everything in the exactingly selected and elegantly installed show—war clubs, shields, garments, headdresses, many pipes, bags, a saddle blanket, a bear-claw necklace, dolls, cradleboards—impresses as a peak artistic achievement. So high is the level of quality that it rather distracts, with sheer pleasure, from the background history and the anthropology of Native American experience. That's good if, having looked, you stay to reflect on the lives that the objects complemented. Notice that almost nothing

on view bespeaks a settled existence or the character of a particular location. The makers of the things subsisted on the move. Portability ruled. Plains art is a world apart from the pottery of Southwestern tribes or the totems of the Northwest. (With just two inventively carved wooden "feast bowls," the show suggests a relative indifference on the part of Plains tribes to rituals of cooking and eating.) The art was preoccupied with religious observation and war—fighting that was often governed by the performance of "counting coup." A Plains warrior won prestige by physically touching an enemy—fatally or not—and getting away. For each coup, he might be awarded, quite literally, a feather in his cap. The European style of conflict—organized slaughter—tended to confuse as well as to scandalize the native Plains peoples, who effectively mastered it only under Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, at the Little Bighorn, in 1876, by which time it was too late to make a strategic difference.

A richly informative essay, in the show's catalogue, by the Oglala Lakota artist and writer Arthur Amiotte describes the ethos of Plains Indians as based in rites of passage, for men, and in principles of endurance, for all: "courage without complaint." Elders were revered as conveyors of tradition. "The quality of hide tanning, tailoring, and decoration was the hallmark of an accomplished, talented, and industrious woman," while "a man counted his wealth in the number of fine trained horses he owned." Religious beliefs varied, but many tribes staged summertime Sun Dance ceremonies, which entailed grueling tests for young men. In line with federal policies of forced assimilation, full observance of Native American rituals was proscribed from 1883 until 1978, when the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed.

The popular perception of Native American identity passed to Wild West shows (in a grainy film clip at the Met, we glimpse Buffalo Bill and galloping braves) and, of course, the movies, which appropriately are not addressed in the show, since they were solely about the attitudes of non-Indian audiences. But the past half century has seen a surge, led by "the fourth generation to be re-

ervation born," of festivals, arts, scholarship, and such religious expressions as the Native American Church and peyote ceremonies. The show ends with sophisticated contemporary paintings, photographs, a video installation, and works in mixed media.

Well-known Native American artists who emerged in the nineteen-eighties—notably the conceptualist and sculptor Edgar Heap of Birds and the painter and assemblagist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith—epitomize both the force and the burden of identity politics in art. A red-lettered sign, in enamel on aluminum, by Heap of Birds is from a public-art series, of 1990, that memorializes forty Dakota Indians hanged in Minnesota in 1862 and 1865. Quick-to-See Smith's "Trade (Gifts for Trading Lands with White People)" (1992), a large painting with photographic images and attached objects, amounts, for a viewer, to a pitched battle between furiously exercised virtuosity and illustrated polemics. But such efforts now seem to have been necessary to establish grounds for more relaxed recoveries of tribal motives and forms, as in an intricate, stunningly lovely feathered fan—or is it a sculpture of a fan?—titled "We Pray for Rain" (2011), by the young Navajo artist Monty Claw.

What sinks in, as you absorb the show, is the spiritual spell of the Great Plains—an essence that will resonate with anyone who has spent time on the prairie. Standing out there, you are at once dwarfed to nearly nothing and made the dead center of everything that is. This inescapable paradox makes living sense of works that, whether drawn or carved or beaded or feathered, invariably broadcast qualities of painstaking, economical craft and jolts of resilient pride. There is a singleness to each of them, preserving the here and the now of its making by an individual who was an intimate of boundlessness, impelled often to move on with the maximum practicable speed. The enchantment of the prairie will be a pretty lonesome transcendence for most of us. (You get back in the car. Turn the key. Find a motel.) It hardly grants access to the subtleties of Plains Indian worship and philosophy, but it affords a vision that, once wholly theirs, is now perforce also ours. ♦

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YOUNG LOVE

"Cinderella" and "It Follows."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Lily James and Cate Blanchett in Kenneth Branagh's version of the fairy tale.

The tone of the new “Cinderella” is set in an early scene, when the heroine’s mother declares, “I believe in evrything.” O.K., here it is. For the next hundred minutes or more, we get the story straight, with no strings or second thoughts attached. Cinderella (Lily James) is the child of a loving mother (Hayley Atwell) and an equally doting father (Ben Chaplin). They dwell in a meadow-girt house—a small and cloudless kingdom of their own—inside a larger kingdom that is smilingly ruled by an elderly monarch (Derek Jacobi), soon to be succeeded by his merry yet thoughtful son, Kit (Richard Madden). Cinderella’s mother dies, very gently, and her place is taken by a stepmother (Cate Blanchett) and her querulous daughters (Holliday Grainger and Sophie McShera). Cinderella’s father dies, on a journey, leaving her to be bullied and put to work. When a ball is held at the royal palace, she is stopped from going by the stepmother, only to be rescued and reclothed by a fairy godmother (Helena Bonham Carter). Onward we dance, to the ending that no spoiler can harm. The slipper is fashioned from glass, and it fits.

What are we to make of this? It is a Disney production, written by Chris Weitz and directed by Kenneth Branagh, and it’s all in live action, brocaded with special effects, and deeply in debt to the animated version of 1950. Indeed, there is barely a frame of Branagh’s film that would cause Uncle Walt to finger his mustache with disquiet. The effect is to erase any memory not just of DreamWorks’ *Shrek* franchise, where Pinocchio gags were tossed around like toys, but also of Disney’s own *“Enchanted,”* which held up the figures of legend, like the prince and the sugar-sweet maiden, as if in quotation marks. At a time when that deconstructive urge is the norm, and in an area of fiction—the fairy tale—that has been trampled by critical theory, Branagh has delivered a construction project so solid, so naïve, and so rigorously stripped of irony that it borders on the heroic. You could call it “Apocalypse Never.”

The principal source here is Charles Perrault, whose cluster of fairy stories, published in 1697, introduced the pumpkins and the godmother. With that love of transformative magic, he

remains a patron saint of Disney—far more so than the Grimms, who gave us, in dripping detail, the stepsisters’ valiant efforts to make the slipper fit. (One of them amputated her toes; the other sliced off a chunk of her heel.) The father’s role, in many versions of the tale, was disarmingly dark, either compliant with the abuse of his child or tarred with incest. New Disney, on the other hand, follows old Disney by arranging for the father’s demise, and thus for the enshrining of his virtue, although I did catch the breath of something creepy in the closeups of Ben Chaplin’s fond and proprietary smirk.

So what will summon children to the film? Not, I suspect, the exalting of courage and kindness in Weitz’s screenplay, which will leave them feeling more badgered than convinced; or the animated short, “Frozen Fever,” that will be shown with “Cinderella,” and which struck me as sickly and confused. Rather, what crowns the movie, flourishing the fullness of its purpose, is color. When, with the ball afoot, our heroine’s gown is converted from a demure and serviceable pink to an empyrean blue, starred all over with crystals as if it were cut from the night sky, the girls in the movie theatre—fans of the full-length “Frozen,” I presume—will not only swoon but get the hint that Cinderella is now ready to be royal. You could try telling them that they are being drugged by sexist and imperialist archetypes that lost their potency decades, if not centuries, ago, but stand by to be strangled with your own Twizzlers. Some myths just will not go away.

The same is true of the tresses. Branagh’s coiffure, when he played Reinhard Heydrich, in “Conspiracy” (2001), was dyed to an Aryan lightness that made him frightening to behold, but, in the spectrum of fairy tales, that won’t wash. Even if you haven’t read Marina Warner’s “From the Beast to the Blonde” (a book that every legend-hunter should own), you can scarcely miss the favor that is routinely shown, by Perrault and his peers, to the flaxen-haired. Gentlemen prefer blondes, and they marry them. Life, like the complexion of villains, isn’t fair. That is why, in this latest “Cinderella,” no fewer than three brunettes—Lily James, Helena Bonham Carter, and Hayley Atwell—are kitted out with

neck-riking heaps of golden locks, while the one true blonde, Cate Blanchett, becomes a vulpine orange-red. As compensation for this old-school moral palette, the movie is granted a broader racial range; the king presides over a multi-ethnic land, and his son's black sidekick (Nonso Anozie) proves crucial to uniting the lovers. Branagh is at ease with this equality, not making a big deal of it, just as his "Much Ado About Nothing" (1993) was improved and beautified by the presence of Denzel Washington, even if the film was a shade too sunny for that troubled play.

The production designer, on the new movie, is Dante Ferretti, a trusted collaborator of Scorsese and Fellini. (Forty years before "Cinderella," he designed Pasolini's "Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom." It's been a long journey.) You can gauge Ferretti's influence not just in the lushness of the rooms but in the doorways that frequently frame the action; in leading our gaze from one room into the next, they kindle a quiet belief that we are not so much watching a story as glimpsing or overhearing it, much as it was told and retold through time. As for the costumes, I imagine that the Academy Award already has Sandy Powell's name on it, and has been shoved in a drawer until she can swing by and pick it up next year. To date, she has ten nominations and three wins. One more won't hurt.

The most telling shot in "Cinderella" is the first entrance of the stepmother, the train of whose outfit we gawk at, from behind, well before we see her face. (And even that is veiled.) The greens that Blanchett wears run

from deep and rustling—suggesting that her character, however sophisticated, has emerged like a primitive legend from some Germanic forest—to an acidic lime sheen that would, we feel, be poisonous to the touch. Although her braying laugh is perhaps too vulgar a honk for an actress as sly as Blanchett, she atones for it with a delicious scene in which, on a private visit, she meets the Grand Duke (Stellan Skarsgård). He is the court's resident bad apple, and the two of them have plans. "Are you threatening me?" he asks. "Yes," she says, with the calmness of a seducer. Could they be entwined in anything more than the wish to thwart Cinderella? Let's just say it was no surprise to learn, in the final voice-over, that the two of them quit the kingdom, and were never seen again. And they both lived hotly ever after.

Another country, another blonde, and another danger in store. The heroine of "It Follows" is a teen-ager named Jay (Maika Monroe), who, lacking a golden coach, has to settle for the back seat of a car, in a desolate parking lot, in Detroit. Like Cinderella, she's into a guy she barely knows, but there the similarity ends. The guy is no prince, and, after they've made love, he ties her up and explains what is going to happen. He won't hurt her, but something will—a demonic plague that takes the form of a different person, walking slowly and unstoppably toward you, every time you see it, but which remains invisible to others. You catch it by having sex, and you get rid of it by having sex with somebody else, although here's the thing: if

not passed on, it will dispatch its victim, then work its way back to you.

"It Follows" is a fine title, blending a logician's briskness with the job description of a stalker, and David Robert Mitchell, the writer and director, has fun with his various predators. Some are old, others young. The most memorable is a naked, graying fellow perched on the roof of a house, staring at Jay as she drives away, and the freakiest assails her in a swimming pool. (He also resembles her father, as briefly seen in a photograph. Try not to think about that.) In the wake of another Detroit film, Jim Jarmusch's "Only Lovers Left Alive," Mitchell seeks to conjure not just an atmosphere but a distinct genre: slacker-horror. Of course, "It Follows" can be parsed as a parable of promiscuity, yet what nags at you is its dazed and aimless air. Jay and her friends go from hanging out to freaking out, then back to hanging out, and the risk that we might be bored by watching bored young folk, whatever their apprehensions, is not one that Mitchell wholly avoids. His opening shot, with its placid suburban street, reminds you of Haddonfield, Illinois, where Jamie Lee Curtis was pursued in "Halloween," and the director of that movie, John Carpenter, supplied a throbbing electronic score that is constantly echoed here. I happen to prefer the extreme unslackness of "Halloween," and the resourceful pluck of Curtis, to the dreamier dread of Maika Monroe. Nonetheless, like her pursuers, "It Follows" won't leave you alone. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, March 15th. The finalists in the February 23rd & March 2nd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 30th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"We have to move out—I just sold a painting."

Pedram Razavi, Palo Alto, Calif.



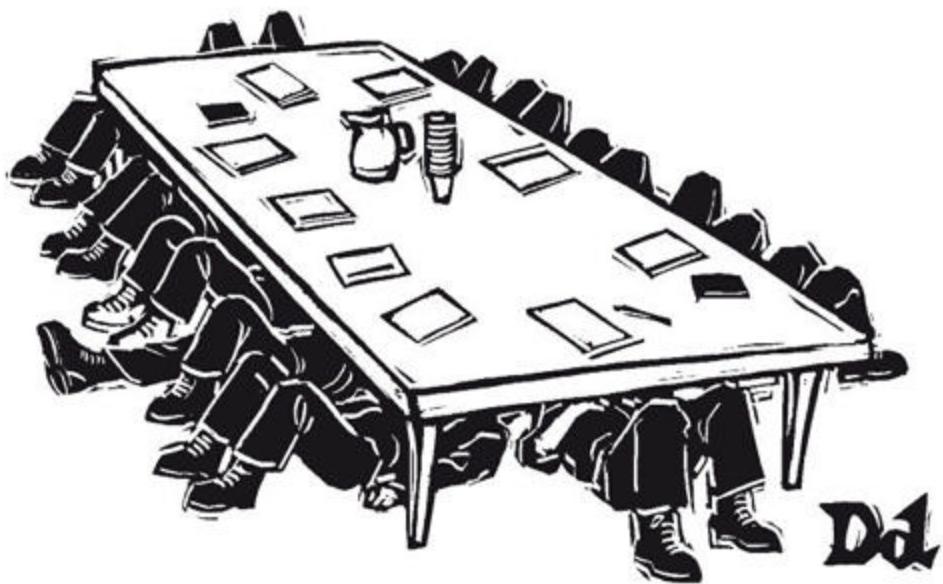
THE FINALISTS

"My bedroom? That's where the sleep happens."
Christopher Monley, Redford, Mich.

"It's not what it looks like."
Caitlin McShea, Santa Fe, N.M.

"You seemed disillusioned."
Maggie Tishman, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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